

# SCRUTINY

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## A Quarterly Review

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# THE AMERICAN CULTURAL SCENE

## (II) CRITICISM

THAT the history of literature in the United States has been largely a study in different types of frustration has become a critical commonplace. During the past quarter of a century it has had a vitality probably superior to that of the literature of any European nation ; and since its beginnings about a hundred years ago it has been capable of producing seminal ideas which, when transplanted into European soil, have often had an extraordinary influence. But what has never occurred in America is the normal and harmonious growth into maturity of a major talent. American literature has produced minor writers capable of perfection within a very limited range (Hawthorne, Emily Dickinson), writers of potential greatness thwarted and thrown off their balance by a lack of critical understanding and appreciation (Melville), mediocre writers swollen into the appearance of greatness by their mystical identification with Americanism (Emerson, Whitman), writers notable only for a perverse originality (Poe), writers with vitality but no cultural discipline (Mark Twain), and (the case with the majority of those now living) writers of limited scope who cultivate a single theme or a single stylistic technique and who then repeat themselves as often as their public will tolerate it. But with the exception of (perhaps) two expatriates, it has never had a literary master of the first rank.

The impediments to the intellectual life in America have been diagnosed so frequently during the past quarter of a century that an attitude of hostility to all that America represents became, for a period, more or less *de rigueur* among persons who liked to consider themselves as intellectuals ; and it is only within the last three or four years, since the growth of Fascism in Europe, that a patriotic reaction has set in. What is sometimes called the American Renaissance, whose beginnings can be dated about the year 1912,

was mainly a movement of self-criticism. Its most influential spokesman in its early days was Van Wyck Brooks, who published a number of essays deploring the lack of sound intellectual standards and whose attacks on the complacent provincialism which then characterized American cultural life were seconded by such writers as Lewis Mumford, Waldo Frank, and the late Randolph Bourne. During the cynical 'twenties, while half a dozen literary movements came and went, there was a prolonged assault on every front against the traditional ideals and institutions. The deficiencies of American culture were ascribed in turn to too much democracy and to too little democracy, to too much emotional repression and to too little emotional repression, to contempt for European standards and to subservience to Europe. Literary radicals devoted themselves to undermining every form of national complacency and to dissecting in long and dreary sociological novels every aspect of national life ; while academic conservatives, anxious to rationalize their fear of emotional freedom and their inability to understand the newer literary forms, rallied behind that eccentric Puritan revival known as Humanism. Finally, with the onset of the depression, most of these forms of protest became canalized into the left-wing political movement, and it was decided that the fundamental reason for all the intellectual maladies of America was the capitalist system.

The accomplishments of the Renaissance were by no means despicable. Though it produced no great writer, it created a very luxuriant literary undergrowth. Its improvements of literary technique were considerable. It stimulated a popular interest in literature which is probably more widely diffused than in most European countries, and it elevated the general level of popular taste—as can be seen by contrasting any list of recent best-sellers with their prototypes of thirty years ago. It remains true, nevertheless, that frustration is the usual fate of the American writer, although it may take different forms than in the past. The democratization of the literary life is not an unmixed advantage, since writers who might have flourished in a relative obscurity are now exposed to the temptation of seeking enormous sales and to the need for winning and retaining the applause of metropolitan reviewers—a situation which accounts for the disappointing development of a number of promising careers. And while the New York

press finds masterpieces among the mediocre and the immature, the more vigorous talents are under constant pressure both from their own consciences and from the Marxist critics to become Marxist propagandists. But whatever may be the political merits of a revolutionary programme, there is no doubt that the attempt to arouse the class consciousness of the proletariat and to follow all the deviations of the party line has had a paralysing effect on writers, who have continued to be productive only when (like James T. Farrell) they have escaped into Trotskyism or (like Dos Passos) they have abandoned their allegiance to any specific political programme. In spite of these instances the pressure to adhere to the orthodox party ideology is very considerable, particularly in the case of writers who cannot count on a large middle-class public ; and those who (like Waldo Frank) have identified themselves with the Communist movement and have afterwards left it are apt to find themselves without any audience at all.

The main cause for the frustration of the literary career in America is to be sought, no doubt, in the prevalent tastes and standards of criticism. Of talent and the desire to cultivate it there has been no lack ; but its healthy and harmonious development requires the appropriate critical environment. And by criticism in this sense is means not merely the analysis of what writers have actually done or set out to do—the task of the historian rather than the critic of literature—but the statement of what appropriately could or should be attempted in literature, of its general scope and function, and of its proper role in relation to the problems of social and individual morality. Criticism of this kind is prior to creation and serves to guide it ; and the practice of it necessarily involves a philosophical or religious view of the nature of man and of civilized living, and—if its literary fruits are to be healthy—is incompatible with any doctrines of mechanism or determinism. The importance of this kind of criticism, and the lack of it in twentieth-century America, has been emphasized in a recent book by Mrs. Colum, *From These Roots*, which traces the prevalent tendencies of modern European and American literature back through the French and English critics, Taine and Saint-Beuve, Wordsworth and Coleridge, to their origins in Lessing and Herder. As a simple and lucid introduction to the Romantic and

post-Romantic movements—Mrs. Colum does not aspire to do more than this—the book can be strongly recommended. It is of particular interest in illustrating the fact that a new kind of literary creation is accompanied and preceded by a new kind of criticism, and because of Mrs. Colum's European background, which enables her to see American characteristics in perspective and to show how the ideas which appear as novelties in the New York of the nineteen-thirties were commonplaces in the Paris of two or three generations ago.

If American culture is viewed in the broad perspectives which Mrs. Colum's study suggests, it may be doubted whether American critics have ever given writers the kind of guidance which they need or whether the literary reformers have ever been sufficiently fundamental in their diagnoses. Roughly speaking, critical programmes have followed two main tendencies: American writers have been urged to create an American literature, something which would be different from any European literature and which would express the democratic greatness and destiny of the New World ; or they have been expected to set themselves up as religious or political reformers, calling attention to the evils of the national life and proclaiming a way of salvation. The great exemplar of the former of these tendencies was Emerson, whose faith in America was imbued with a vague mystical belief in divine guidance derived from a fusion of his ancestral Puritanism with German Romantic philosophy. What Americanism means remains, however, obscure ; it is a mysticism almost devoid of content, and definable only by negatives. In practice, it is apt to mean that literature should be formless, gargantuan and all-inclusive because America is like that (as in the poetry of Whitman, or the novels of Thomas Wolfe), or that some indefinable mystical emotion should attach itself to the American soil and the achievements of American technology (as in the poetry of Hart Crane). The latter tendency—the belief that the artist should be a reformer—has been the dominant motif in criticism for the last quarter of a century. It was the favourite idea of Van Wyck Brooks, whose destructive analyses of the American cultural scene showed a remarkable insight but who apparently believed that what was needed to regenerate America was the appearance of a number of American H. G. Wellses. Literature, in other words, was to be an instrument of the will—

a conception which the more influential writers of the last generation have faithfully endeavoured to realize. To what concrete ends the will was to be directed has, however, remained obscure. The school of Van Wyck Brooks has been admirable in pointing out to what extent American life fell short of civilized standards ; but of what civilization itself consists has remained undefined.

These critical tendencies should perhaps be regarded as an expression of those same forces whose cruder manifestations they have opposed ; American critics, in other words, have not been sufficiently radical. The three factors which have had the greatest influence in creating the American psychology are the Puritan view of life, the conquest of the American continent, and the industrial system. Their combined effect has been to create a hypertrophy of the will, which results in the domination rather than the qualitative appreciation of an environment. The American is concerned not with the sympathetic understanding of objects, as qualitative wholes, but with the abstraction from the real world of those aspects of it which can be used. Reality loses its sensuous fulness, and becomes a complex of abstract and bloodless lines of force. From this tendency can be traced all the more conspicuous traits of the American, or—more accurately, perhaps—of the Anglo-Saxon American of the Northern states: his peculiarly rootless and, as it were, disembodied intellectuality and idealism, which is combined with a lack of sensuous richness and of strong emotional attachments, his pragmatic and utilitarian philosophy, his restless energy, and his inability to convey in his physical environment any sense of harmony, of mutual adjustment, between man and nature. These characteristics, which are almost the negation of the æsthetic attitude, reappear in American literature. America, as the mystic entity postulated by Emerson and Whitman, becomes a bloodless abstraction consisting not of concrete specific places and people but of names on a map and undifferentiated specimens of the genus Man. The literature of social exposure and reform is concerned not with things in themselves but with usable aspects of them. Its trend is always towards satire, and instead of drawing human beings in their totality, it depicts them as grotesque or sub-human and as the mechanistic victims of social forces—tendencies from which very few of the American novelists of the last quarter of a century have been immune. What American

literature requires from its critics, therefore, is not so much any re-orientation of the will, any re-definition of American ideals, as simply the assertion of the æsthetic attitude as an independent mode of apprehension, having as its function the defining of the real world in its sensuous concreteness. And those contemporary writers who have set out to record the American scene rather than to change it—for example, William Carlos Williams—have probably contributed more to the growth of an indigenous culture than all the prophets of the mystical America and the proletarian revolution.

The past two decades have, nevertheless, been a time of increasing critical maturity ; and in spite of the efforts of the Humanists and the Marxists to use literature in behalf of specific programmes of moral and political improvement, there are a growing number of writers capable of judging literature by the insight which it gives rather than by the kind of activity which it is likely to promote. As proof of this can be cited the large body and range of criticism contained in a recent anthology edited by Morton Dauwen Zabel, *Literary Opinion in America*. This gives a very adequate representation of recent critical trends, and contains a number of those scrupulous and detailed studies of individual authors which were stimulated by such magazines as *The Hound and Horn* and *The Symposium* and which have been undertaken by such writers as R. P. Blackmur, Philip Blair Rice, William Troy, and Mr. Zabel himself.

What emerges both from this anthology and from other recent books is the inability of those who approach literature in social and political terms to provide any genuinely æsthetic guidance. Marxist reviewers in such organs as *The New Masses* proclaim, of course, that the writer must arouse the revolutionary consciousness of the masses ; but Marxist critics who are sensitive to literary values usually confine themselves to elucidating what actually has been done by writers in the past. The Marxist approach may account for the content of a work of art, but it cannot say what gives that content artistic value. The two ablest left-wing critics are, no doubt, Mr. Edmund Wilson and Mr. Kenneth Burke, of whom the former is not a Communist but would probably call himself a Marxist, while the latter is not an orthodox Marxist but supports the Communist Party. Mr. Wilson writes a better prose than any other American critic, and his study of the symbolist

movement, *Axel's Castle*, is probably the finest piece of literary history which has been written in America. His most recent volume, *The Triple Thinkers*, a collection of scattered essays on such subjects as Pushkin, Housman, Shaw, James, and Marxism and Literature, exhibits the same virtues and the same deficiencies ; it contains admirable examinations of authors of the past but offers little critical guidance to authors of the future. The implication is always that writers should be politically conscious, but how their political intelligence ought to express itself in their work remains somewhat obscure. Mr. Burke once wrote a book called *Counter-Statement*, in which he proclaimed a necessary opposition between the writer and whatever forces were socially dominant, and made a valuable study of literary form in terms of the psychology of the audience. Since adopting Communism, he has published *Attitudes Towards History*, which may be described as an anatomy of the non-rational factors in social change. By studying the social development of western civilization in terms of its effects in the emotional development of individuals, he is able to co-ordinate social and literary criticism, and to provide a general framework within which different authors can be placed. Reversing the usual Marxist procedure, he argues not that literature should express political forces but that coming political changes express themselves first in literature ; art is a social barometer which indicates the rise and fall of social systems. Mr. Burke has an unusually wide range of information, and a very rich, though a very perverse, mind. He can be trusted to propound ideas which would not have occurred to anyone else, but their value is often dubious. Like other left-wing writers, however, he has become a historian rather than a critic of literature.<sup>1</sup>

For a criticism which deals with the future of literature and not merely with its past, one must turn to writers who are concerned with æsthetic experience itself. Of these the most important are Mr. Yvor Winters and Mr. Allen Tate.

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<sup>1</sup>One might also cite the case of Van Wyck Brooks, who emerged from a long retirement to produce, in *The Flowering of New England*, an elaborate reconstruction of New England culture between 1820 and 1860 which contained no critical judgments whatever.



Mr. Winters's two volumes, *Primitivism and Decadence* and *Maule's Curse*, are examinations of contemporary poetry and of certain leading American writers of the nineteenth century, and are the beginnings of an ambitious project for a revaluation of all American literature. For Mr. Winters's æsthetic creation is in itself a moral act in that it means the apprehension and ordering of emotional experience; a complete mastery of the experience will be accompanied by a corresponding mastery of the technique of communication, so that literary form and metric acquire a kind of moral significance. For Mr. Winters most modern poetry is decadent, its obscurity and the weaknesses of its formal organization indicating an inability to achieve a full grasp of the experience which is being communicated. In *Maule's Curse* he traces a similar deficiency in the New England group of writers and finds its ultimate cause in the moral obscurantism of Puritanism. As a statement of critical principles Mr. Winters's work deserves wide attention. That it has not received that attention, and that reviewers have consistently misunderstood it, is chiefly because of the eccentricities of Mr. Winters's critical practice. His judgments of particular authors, which are always boldly defiant of conventional opinions, are often convincing, but have one outstanding weakness: an inability to distinguish between writers who achieve formal mastery through a genuine mastery of experience and those who use the traditional forms but never grapple with experience at all. Thus Mr. Winters admires Robert Bridges, Sturge Moore, and a lady called Mrs. Daryush (a daughter of Robert Bridges) and sets them above writers whose technical failures are caused by a genuine attempt to extend the boundaries of poetic experience. Mr. Allen Tate, on the other hand, is probably the most reliable critic of poetry now writing in the United States, and some of the studies of particular poets in his *Reactionary Essays* (a book which was handicapped by its unnecessarily provocative title) can be regarded as definitive. The most important essay in that volume is, however, *Three Types of Poetry*, in which he distinguishes between poetry which aims simply at an imaginative grasp of the totality of experience, poetry which makes itself an instrument of the practical will (and which must therefore allegorize, and abstract from, experience), and poetry which, identifying the abstractions made by the practical

will with reality and finding them unsatisfying, reacts into romantic individualism, irony or despair. During the past two centuries, according to Mr. Tate, poetry has belonged predominantly to the second and third types, but when imaginative writers attempt to provide incentives to action they are missing their true function.

Mr. Winters and Mr. Tate approach literature from different angles, but their fundamental beliefs are similar; and those beliefs are shared by a considerable group of writers, most of whom live either in the South or in California. One might, for example, cite Mr. John Crowe Ransom (who once wrote an admirable book about religion called *God Without Thunder*), the author of *The World's Body*. Long immersion in an academic environment appears, however, to have had the most unfortunate effects on Mr. Ransom's style, and his critical ideas, which are similar to Mr. Tate's, are so encrusted in a belle-lettristic archness and coyness that it is a laborious task to disentangle them.

The critical approach represented by these men is peculiarly valuable because it means that, for almost the first time in America, literature is being studied as an æsthetic creation and not merely as an incentive to some particular kind of activity, moralistic or political, or as an expression of some nationalistic ideal. This assertion of æsthetic autonomy would appear, nevertheless, to have moral and political implications; a belief in æsthetic autonomy involves a belief in moral autonomy, and such a belief is incompatible with any mechanistic or deterministic view of human nature, and perhaps with any collectivist political programme. It raises the problem, moreover, of the relationship, and possible inter-dependence, between the imaginative apprehension of experience in poetry and the analogous apprehension achieved through religious doctrine. Mr. Tate has been especially concerned with these questions, and would define himself as a distributivist and a traditionalist and, probably, as sympathetic to organized religion. But though a thorough-going revaluation of the whole of the American way of life is implicit in the attitudes of that group of Southerners to which he belongs, it has not yet achieved any clear or definitive formulation.

H. B. PARKES.

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(Scribners).

## THE IDEAS OF MACHIAVELLI

*' . . . nè mai potette vincere per fraude, ch'ei cercasse di vincere per forza ; perchè diceva, che la vittoria, non il modo della vittoria ti arrecava gloria.'*

*' . . . nor did he ever seek to vanquish by force, where he might conquer by cunning ; for he was wont to say, that victory, not the means of victory, brought thee glory.'*

*From the Life of Castruccio Castracani.*

NO writer has had a more varied reception than Machiavelli, during the four centuries since his death. Dying unnoticed, his name was soon to be associated by every side with their opponents in the European polemics of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation. Huguenots attributed St. Bartholomew's Night to his council, in England he was coupled indiscriminately with St. Ignatius or with the Devil himself, while the Jesuits produced a long series of tracts against him. The nineteenth century brought a swing right over, in his rehabilitation by Italian patriots ; the twentieth has brought the beginnings of a more scientific criticism. The study of Machiavelli's reputation forms an interesting survey in the relativity of criticism, and I hope, later, to offer a study on such lines. At this stage, it is superfluous to attack, and should be unnecessary to defend, the Secretary of Florence—

particularly after Mr. Eliot's stimulating account (in *For Lancelot Andrewes*). Nevertheless, Machiavelli remains popularly associated with the cause of dictatorship, a view expressly fostered by Mussolini himself (see his *Preface to 'The Prince'*), and which has even been the occasion of an article by Mr. Kingsley Martin ('He taught the Dictators' in a number of *Lilliput* last year—where the author, incidentally, gives no indication of having read any work but *The Prince*).

Thus before such a study as I have suggested can be undertaken, it is necessary to examine exactly what Machiavelli's thought and work consisted of. This is not simple. For in the rapidly changing circumstances of life in the late Renaissance Machiavelli never managed to order his ideas into a definite philosophic system (in the way that Dante did earlier)—what we are left with is plenty of far-sighted observation and analysis, together with certain loyalties, or enthusiasms, which certainly constitute an outlook, but not a 'system' in the ordinary sense. In analysing this outlook a certain pedantry is unavoidable, since it is essential, in face of all the criticism that has arisen, to know not only what is written down, but the circumstances in which it was written, because Machiavelli's life bears a very direct relationship to what he wrote. This must be my apology for some insistence on historic detail, and also for frequent quotation, or, where lack of space limits this, for indicating the passage under discussion by footnotes. (Since chapters in the principal works are short, and editions many, I shall not give page references).

## I.

Machiavelli's loyalties in contemporary politics were three. In varying, sometimes conflicting, degrees he felt himself an Italian, a Florentine, and a republican. We shall have to consider what he understood by each of these 'patriotisms' in turn, and to do this we must trace the main events in Italian history at the end of the Renaissance. Machiavelli's active life falls almost exactly into the most critical period, that from Lorenzo de' Medici's death in 1492 to the Sack of Rome in 1527.

In the confused record of the invasions which in Italy followed the fall of the Roman Empire, we can early distinguish a dominant motif—the attempt of the Popes, by allying themselves with

powerful strangers, to establish a temporal dominion on Italian soil, and the efforts of the Emperor to resist this. In the long struggle between the two potentates, numerous provinces managed to wrest their freedom from the feudal contract, and by the middle of the fifteenth century not only France and Spain were strong independent powers, but Milan, Florence, Venice, and many smaller principalities governed themselves autonomously. Naples was probably the only recognized fief in Italy, and was disputed between Spanish and French princes. Milan too was a disputed title, claimed by the Emperor, the dukes of Orleans, and the local Sforza dynasty. Florence was dominated by the rich family of the Medici, and held most of Tuscany, including Pisa. Venice was by far the strongest Italian power: an aristocratic republic, still powerful overseas and always ready to encroach on the mainland. The papal states stretching up as far as Bologna were ruled by petty tyrants or governors. Machiavelli was to raise a bitter criticism of the papacy, in asserting that by not being strong enough to bring all Italy under one ruler, yet strong enough to prevent another from doing so, she held the country disunited and weak, a prey 'not only to powerful foreigners, but to whoever assaults her.'<sup>1</sup>

'Corruption' in Italy—what we should call decadence—was universally recognized. Savonarola, Machiavelli, Pico della Mirandola, and several popes, all saw and criticized this 'corruption,' in their own ways. The licence of the clergy was a commonplace; and the country was ravaged by the mercenary adventurers who turned their swords for the highest bidder—another subject for the rasping criticism of Machiavelli. Allied to the general feeling of corruption was the almost equally universal fear of invasion. Savonarola foretold the coming of the French king as the scourge of Italy; the Popes summoned crusades against the Turk; Venice feared the Emperor; while Machiavelli in a wild moment suggested that the Swiss would be the conquering Romans of the day. Soon after Lorenzo the Magnificent's death the gathering storm broke.

In 1494 Charles VIII of France crossed the Alps and made his way without serious resistance down to Naples, which he occupied. On the way he overturned the constitutions of a number of states, including that of Florence, who drove out the Medici

and established a republic under French protection ; Pisa profited to seize her independence. In the following year Charles was driven from Naples. But in 1498, a new king, Louis XII, was crowned, uniting the titles of Milan and Naples to France. In the same year he seized Milan, after coming to an agreement with Pope Alexander VI.

The terms of this agreement were a French title and marriage alliance for the Pope's favourite son, Cæsar Borgia, who now became Duke Valentine. The next few years in Italy were mainly concerned with the Duke's campaign in the Romagna to found a central Italian monarchy for himself, and in spite of initial disadvantages, and a large scale mutiny of his officers, he was within an ace of succeeding, when his father died suddenly in 1503. The subsequently elected Pope, Julius II, rapidly reduced the Duke's power to ruins. Valentine's meteoric career must be remembered in relation to Machiavelli's work.

The first important move of the new Pope was to set out in person to assert his authority over the Papal States, and he soon recovered all except those held by Venice. He now made overtures to France, Spain, England and the Emperor for an alliance ; in 1508 the famous League of Cambrai was signed, which rapidly defeated Venetian power. But no sooner had this been achieved than the Pope found himself intolerably threatened by his former ally, the French king, who now dominated northern Italy, while Florence and Ferrara were his close allies. The remainder of Julius II's pontificate was directed towards driving the French from Italy. In this he was helped by Spain, anxious to end all French pretensions to Naples, and by the enemies of the Florentine republic, as well as by the direct enemies of France. By 1512, the French were defeated, the Medici re-instated in Florence, and a descendant of the Sforza ruled Milan.

Spain was now undisputed ruler of southern, and predominant in central, Italy. That alliance which was to make the papacy a practical vassal of Spanish interests for the next half-century was appearing. The already powerful Charles V was elected Emperor in 1519, and an initial war made him master of Milan. A frenzied attempt by Pope Clement VII to re-create the balance of power resulted in the Holy League of Cognac. But the anarchic forces of this league were easily routed by the Emperor, and Rome was

sacked in May, 1527. In Florence, the Medici were once more overthrown, and a republican government withstood siege for another three years, but since Machiavelli died in 1527, subsequent history need not concern us.

## II.

That was what Machiavelli saw as an Italian patriot. Much of his theoretical work is concerned with events and policies leading up to 1512. But as a Florentine, and a servant of the republic, he was more intimately interested in the politics of his native city.

Born in 1496, of middle-bourgeois parents, he probably received a not exceptional humanistic education; he entered an unimportant government service in 1494, and four years later was promoted to a sort of chancellorship, where he acted as secretary and adviser to the Council of Ten. He seems rapidly to have gained their confidence: while the republic lasted, wherever there was delicate business of state on hand the Secretary of Florence was sent, sometimes with fairly precise instructions, but always, and sometimes only, to make the best use possible of his eyes and ears and report everything to the Council.

In the politics of the Renaissance, Florence was very small fry. Too weak ever to take an independent lead, her policy consisted in continually readjusting by astute diplomacy her relations with the stronger powers in an endeavour to maintain her liberties and her territorial integrity.

Between the end of 1498 and 1502, Machiavelli was sent on a number of missions in Tuscany, mostly concerned with the attempt to re-subdue Pisa and the surrounding revolted districts. In 1500 he visited the court of France to ask her aid against Pisa. In this early period, as well as the numerous letters to the government, he wrote three minor reports, concerning the dissensions.

During the following winter he visited the court of Cæsar Borgia and was present at Sinigaglia when the Duke rid himself of his rebellious henchmen in the very thorough manner that has made his name famous in history. Shortly after this was composed Machiavelli's first controversial work, the *Description of the method employed by Duke Valentine in killing Vitellozzo Vitelli, Oliverotto da Fermo, the lord Pagolo and the duke Gravina Orsini* (1503).

Follow some minor missions near home, in the course of which

he delivered a discourse to the government strongly criticizing the use of mercenaries in the Pisan campaign—a theme which remained dear to him—and then at the end of 1503 he was sent on another important and interesting mission, to Rome for the conclaves following the death of Alexander VI. Here his only duty was to inform the government of everything that passed, so that they might take the necessary steps to safeguard their interests. His official letters give a fascinating picture of the intrigues round the Roman conclaves. Julius II is duly elected, the Secretary hastens to offer the formal allegiance of the republic, but continues to watch anxiously the issue of the old enmity between the new Pope and the Duke Valentine. As soon as it becomes certain that the Duke is no longer to be reckoned with, Machiavelli is recalled. During the relative inaction of the next year or two, he composed and published the first and second of his *Decennali*, verses describing the events of the preceding years in Italy.

Meanwhile the Pisan war was dragging on, and finally, all other methods having failed, the council gave Machiavelli authority to carry out his plan for instituting the national militia he had so enthusiastically recommended. For a while he was very busy travelling through the Florentine territories enrolling soldiers under the new ordinances. This work was interrupted from time to time for foreign missions, notably one to the Emperor Maximilian, who was threatening to invade Italy; this gave Machiavelli his first personal contact with Germany, and he subsequently wrote the three reports concerning the affairs of the Empire. On his return, he brought the war to a conclusion by laying waste the surrounding territory on a hitherto unprecedented scale, and simply starving the city into subjection. Machiavelli—here is a characteristic sidelight on his idealism—attributed this victory exclusively to the virtues of the new militia, an illusion that was to cost Florence dear before long.

Events were now moving towards the decisive rupture between Julius II and France. Up to this, under Soderini, Florence had been the close ally of France, but had also been careful to propitiate the Pope. This had served while the two acted in unison, but it now became fatally necessary to choose, since France demanded active support, while the Pope would certainly tolerate nothing less than neutrality. Machiavelli was sent to France to postpone



as long as possible any decision, but Florence was already too far committed: the enemies of the republic were intriguing with the Papal league, and the defeat of the French, and the cowardly surrender of the militia, brought the restoration of the Medici.

Soderini was exiled, and his faithful servant Machiavelli deprived of office. Shortly afterwards the ex-Secretary was arrested on suspicion of complicity in a plot to restore the republic, of which he appears to have been innocent, was tortured, and, on release, banished for a year from the city.

1513 finds Machiavelli in his villa at San Casciano in extreme poverty, and—what he liked still less—in enforced idleness. In a letter to his friend, Francesco Vettori, ambassador in Rome (who had made his peace with the Medici as soon as he saw which way the wind was blowing), he describes how he spends his time. After a day passed dejectedly gaming with the peasants of his estate, when evening comes, he dons his courtier's robes, and then, forgetting every worry, consumes the hours diligently consulting the great statesmen of the past and present: it is in this same letter that he announces the composition of the *Prince*, 'and if any of my chatter ever pleased you, this should not displease you; and to a prince, and above all to a new prince, it should be acceptable; therefore I am addressing it to his Majesty Giuliano . . . ' He goes on to ask Vettori whether it were better to send it, or to present it, to Giuliano de' Medici, and then adds in pathetic terms his wish to be employed by 'these Medici lords, even if I must begin by rolling stones.'<sup>2</sup> But Machiavelli hesitated so long over presenting his *opuscolo* that Giuliano died in the meantime and it had to be re-dedicated to the young Duke Lorenzo; apparently it was ultimately presented, but there is no evidence as to how it was received, or whether it was even read.

Machiavelli was to remain unemployed for some seven years. Over the first part of this period he seems to have composed the bulk of his *Discourses over the first Decade of Titus Livy*, parts of which were read in a sort of Platonic academy of young Florentines who used to meet in a garden near the city. *The Art of War* (1520) was written in dialogue for the same audience, and sometime during his political inactivity, Machiavelli composed his comedies (which were not however performed until some years

later), the *Tale of Belfagor the Archdevil*, and a number of poems and minor works.

Through his younger friends in the academy, Machiavelli was now gradually brought into favour with the Medici, and particularly with the Cardinal Giulio, later Clement VII. In 1519 he composed the short but significant *Discourse on the reform of Florence*, probably by request of Leo X. Soon after this he was employed by the Cardinal Giulio on a small mission to Lucca. While there he wrote his *Summary of the Affairs of Lucca* and the more important *Life of Castruccio Castracani of Lucca* (1520), this also dedicated to friends in the young academy.

On his return he was commissioned by the Cardinal to write the *Florentine Histories* (not completed until 1527), and sent on one or two small journeys of state. After some hesitation the new Pope Clement VII made up his mind to employ him in the papal service, and for the last two years of Machiavelli's life he was actively employed. In 1526 he wrote a report on the defences of Florence. During the next twelve months he was sent on three separate missions to Francesco Guicciardini, Papal governor in the Romagna. Letters show the two of them to have watched with culminating dismay the events bringing Italian liberty to an end. There is a picturesque story that, when the Medici partisans were overthrown in Florence, Machiavelli again offered his services to his cherished republic, was again refused because of complicity in the government which had just been ousted, and took poison or died of a broken heart. At all events, Niccolò Machiavelli died obscurely, after receiving the last sacraments, in his native city, on the 22nd of June, 1527, aged fifty-nine years.

### III.

If we now turn to consider the general character of Machiavelli's written works, taking them in chronological order we can early distinguish two divergent tendencies. To begin with, Machiavelli was a minor diplomat, and such a position involved something of the function of a modern journalist writing on foreign affairs. This is the origin not only of the comprehensive series of letters in the *Legations*, but of the several reports such as those concerning Pisa, France, and Germany. But already in the *Discourse on Pisa* (1499), there is discernible an interest divorced from immediate

practical affairs, a creative interest in politics for the sake of politics. In the *Method for treating the rebelled peoples of the Valdichiana* (1502) this tendency is further evident, and is now backed by a rather pompous argument on classical precedent; in the *Description of the method of Duke Valentine* (1503), it is dominant. Here we have an imaginative account which conflicts factually with the writer's own reports in his official letters. The *Description* is evidently an attempt to re-create the methods of firm political action, while provisionally disregarding the end towards which they are directed. Thus while the letters were preoccupied with the problem of the growth and menace to Florence of the Duke's power, the *Description* is, if not frankly admiring, at least non-critical of its protagonist.

This urge towards independent creation remained constant to Machiavelli throughout his life. At intervals he composed and translated a number of plays, and a small quantity of not very distinguished, though at times poignant verses. (As it happened, these were almost the only parts of his writings to achieve general recognition during his life-time). In this group of imaginative writings we must include the *Life of Castruccio* and the conventionally humorous *Belfagor*. Among the more or less official works fall the *Florentine Histories*, written on commission, of slight general interest. But in the *Prince*, the *Discourses over the first Decade of Titus Livy* and the *Art of War*, both elements of the preceding works are fused. The impulse is creative, but the accomplished work is closely correlated with experienced fact, and the aim is on the whole practical, although they are no longer addressed to an established government, but to an ideal audience of disinterested politicians. There is some justification for regarding these three works as a trilogy, since a number of cross-references show that the author intended them to be read in conjunction.

I have mentioned that Machiavelli's outlook was strongly influenced by certain loyalties in his political environment, and I must now add two further factors in his thought. The first is a fundamentally scientific interest in the sheer mechanism of political action: this is best shown in relation to the *Discourses*. The second is the common stock of humanism shared by the men of the Renaissance, consisting in a fervent admiration for the heroes of

antiquity and a sometimes uncritical acceptance of their precedents whether in literature, politics or art.

What Machiavelli took of humanism for himself can best be seen in the use he makes of certain key-words. Like every great Italian writer, Machiavelli is able to build into certain terms meanings which only derive their full significance from a comprehension of the author's entire work. Thus for Dante *virtù*, *intelletto* have a specialized, almost technical meaning. In Machiavelli, the important terms are *virtù*, *la fortuna*, and *la gloria*. *Virtù* has nothing to do with Dante's use of the same word, nor with the English 'virtue.' It might perhaps be rendered 'manliness': it is essentially a-moral, in fact it cuts clean across moral values, so that while Piero Soderini may have been full of *bontà*, or 'goodness,' he was completely devoid of *virtù*<sup>3</sup>, and similarly it is possible in the same phrase to refer to the Emperor Severus as *scellerato* (a rascal) and to his *grandissima virtù*<sup>4</sup>. *La fortuna*, or Fortune, covers a quaint feeling of a pagan goddess of destiny. If a man has both *virtù* and Fortune with him he will achieve *la gloria*. With Fortune but without *virtù* he may achieve success, but not *la gloria*. Without Fortune, however abundant his *virtù*, he is foredoomed to failure, as was Cæsar Borgia, whose final undoing proceeded not from his mistakes, but 'from an extraordinary and extreme malignity of fortune.'<sup>5</sup> And be it noted in passing that here Fortune favours not only the brave, but the young and impetuous: 'like a woman she is a lover of the young, because they are less respectful, more ferocious, and with greater audacity command her.'<sup>6</sup> The union of *virtù* and Fortune then constitutes *la gloria*, or immortal renown. Again the idea is only pragmatically moral, 'glory' comes neither from closet virtue nor from selfishly ambitious achievement, it must be civic renown, and in the constant flux of warring peoples, civic renown becomes inevitably military renown, almost inevitably military conquest. The striving of individuals to achieve this is the prime motive force in history, resulting in the rise of certain states to domination and material wealth; they then tend to become corrupted by luxury, this leads to corruption of the individuals, who become indifferent to civic virtue and the common weal, become avaricious and ambitious, and this leads to tyranny and final decline. Thus we come at the cyclic conception of history which is at the core of

much of Machiavelli's thought.

The working out of these concepts can be seen clearly in the *Life of Castruccio Castracani of Lucca*.

#### IV.

*The Description of the method of Duke Valentine* was a foretaste of what was to be achieved in the *Life of Castruccio*. Historically it is notoriously inaccurate. Villari has called it 'a little politico-military romance.' The effect of it on the reader is just that of an entertaining fiction. As such it is superb. It has a finely tragic rise-and-fall about it—something like the *Tamberlaine* of Marlowe. It tells how Castruccio grew up from his lowly origin to rule over several provinces, of his great feats of arms and his greater feats in cunning, it tells of his death after taking a fever on the field of battle, and of his instructions to his heir, and it ends with a long list of sayings attributed to him, many of them conventional, many of them witty and amusing, whether they be original or not. The role attributed to Fortune appears in Castruccio's words on the point of death: 'Could I have foreseen, dear Son, that Fortune would thus have cut me off in the middle of my course towards that glory which I had promised myself from the uncommon success of my undertakings hitherto, I would have been less solicitous to extend my conquests . . . and have left thee possessed of a dominion, if less extensive, certainly more secure and better established.' But Fortune tempted him, 'like a woman,' and like Cæsar Borgia, he died leaving an Empire broad, but turbulent, which fell to pieces on his death.

But the interest of this work for us is greater than its intrinsic value as a prose epic. For it happens to be the only part of Machiavelli's work where he illustrated the whole man of the ideal that found its purely political expression in the *Prince*. Moreover, while the established form of the *Prince* was undeniably biassed by the circumstances of its dedication, *Castruccio* was addressed to an audience of personal friends, so it may reasonably be taken as a more sincere and direct—I should say a 'purer'—expression of the author's ideal. Historical detail was clearly irrelevant to the main idea, since it conflicts factually with the Castruccio described in Machiavelli's own *Florentine Histories*. To some

extent the *Prince* and *Castruccio* seem complementary. What is explicitly described in the poised reasoning of the *Prince* is implicit in *Castruccio*. Castruccio takes the political maxims of the *Prince* in his stride, as also the theories expressed in the *Art of War*.

It is worth noting a further point: Castruccio's attitude to private morality. Here is a plain negative answer, if one was ever necessary, to the question, did Machiavelli recommend the same morality in private life as in public affairs? History is actually distorted to show Castruccio's personal integrity in private life. (Machiavelli makes Castruccio a bastard, adopted by a Lucchese gentleman; in fact, Castruccio was legitimate: and he died leaving legitimate heirs, but Machiavelli makes him say on his death-bed to the son of his former benefactor: 'I have never taken wife, lest natural affection should have prevented me in any part from showing that affection to the seed of thy father which I held to be due.') Immediately before the quotation with which I have headed this paper comes the affirmation: 'He was grateful to his friends, to his enemies terrible, just among his subjects, faithless to the unfaithful.' Thus *Castruccio* touches lightly but decisively on a subject over which controversy has arisen, and about which Machiavelli never troubled to express himself elsewhere in his work.

## V.

As the title indicates, the *Discourses on the first Decade of Titus Livy* do not form, as the *Prince* does, a consistent treatise. They are in fact simply a commentary on someone else's history (Livy is relatively unimportant) and matters of political interest are discussed as they arise. Apart from this there is no co-ordinated scheme. This makes it a difficult work to approach. For although the bulk of the arguments put forward seem to favour republican government, there are numerous exceptions to this: as it stands the *Discourses* may best be regarded as notes and discussions concerning government, from which the author might, had circumstances demanded, have selected the relevant material for a treatise on republics by exactly the same method he used in composing the *Prince*. The *Discourses* are in fact the reservoir of observation and reflection for both the *Prince* and the *Art of War*. (The latter is little more than a technical elaboration of certain chapters in the *Discourses*, embodying Machiavelli's theoretical conclusions in

favour of a national militia, and of well-trained infantry against cavalry). In spite of this general looseness in structure, however, it is possible to disentangle a fairly consistent skein of doctrines, which may be taken to constitute Machiavelli's outlook on the world.

The initial assumption of the *Discourses* is that common to the humanists, that of the pedagogic value of history: by the analysis of successful and unsuccessful action in the past, whose results are now evident, one may learn what to imitate and what to avoid. But what is the most remarkable quality of these discussions is the complete absence of prejudice with which they are usually conducted. Not only are the rulers of classical antiquity called relentlessly into the dock, and made to answer for their success or failure, but the same method is applied to the rulers of the present and immediate past, whether they be popes, princes, Florentines or Frenchmen. Interest is focussed on laying bare the effective mechanism of government. This should not be taken to contradict what I have said regarding enthusiasm for certain contemporary causes, for these too are subjected to the same unremitting scrutiny—whose actions could be more piercingly analysed than those of the author's personal friend, Piero Soderini, head of the government which Machiavelli risked his livelihood to uphold?

'He believed that time, humanity (*bontà*), his own good fortune, and beneficence, would extinguish envy; for he was young and found himself surrounded by so many friends, attracted by his munificent procedure, that he thought to extinguish the envy of his opponents without violence or scandal: and he did not know that time will wait for no man, humanity is not enough, fortune varies, and malice is not appeased by any good favour.'<sup>15</sup>

Even the evidently false conclusion underestimating the effects of gunfire in war was only arrived at after detailed examination of all the evidence then available.<sup>16</sup> While the majority of discussions take place from the viewpoint of good republican government, not infrequently the same situation is reconsidered from the opposite angle. Thus a discussion of how tyranny arose under the decemvirs in Rome ends typically:

' Be it known, therefore, by this discourse, the errors of the Roman people wishing to save its liberty ; and the errors of Appius wishing to occupy the dictatorship (*tirannide*)'<sup>17</sup>

in which the double edge of the *Discourses* is clear.

Morality, in the sense of a preconceived code having a general application, is excluded. Political morality is severed from private morality, and rarely does a private ethic intrude on a political judgment, and then it is only mentioned to be dismissed in favour of expediency :

' Although to use deceit in any action is detestable, nevertheless in conducting war it is praiseworthy and glorious.'<sup>18</sup>

Or, more forcibly, after advocating Philip of Macedon's example of violently transplanting colonies :

' These methods are very cruel, and inimical to all good living, not only Christian but human ; and any man should flee them, and choose rather to live privately, than as king at such cost in human suffering : nevertheless, he who will not follow that first path of virtue, *if he wish to maintain himself*, will be constrained to enter this way of evil. But men take certain middle ways which are most harmful ; for they do not know how to be either entirely wicked, or entirely good.'<sup>19</sup> (*italics mine*).

Here we see the paradoxical relativity of moral judgment as it appeared to Machiavelli—only too easily a good man may be a bad ruler, and the converse.<sup>20</sup> And since posterity judges politicians by the effect of their actions, not by their motives, a premium is set on success, and therefore on strong government.

In evaluating this concept of good, or strong, government we may for convenience reduce it to this : a free city may be ruled as a Principality, Aristocracy, or by Popular Government (democracy), but these forms easily degenerate into tyranny, oligarchy or licence (anarchy). A mixed government of the nobles and the people such as that of republican Rome is the ideal, but it is extremely rare, and unknown in fifteenth-century Italy. A good popular government is a higher form (*i.e.*, is better) than a good Prince, on the other hand a good Prince is better than a



bad democracy, while between a bad Prince and a bad democracy there is little to choose, and anyway corrupt democracy gives rise to tyranny.<sup>21</sup>

But the hierarchy of governments here taken over from classical philosophy would be static. The whole of this is modified by a complex conception of the dynamics of history. When we get hold of this idea we begin to see how different elements of Machiavelli's outlook fit together.

The Introduction to Book II starts off with a critical defence of the author's humanism. Beginning: 'All men praise the past, and abuse the present, but not always with reason,' he qualifies his defence by postulating an up-and-down process in history: thus those who curse the present, even when they are born in the ascending era are deceived, but those who live in the declining have good cause.

'And pondering how these things came about, I consider the world to have been always of the same composition, and to have had so much good and so much bad; but this bad and this good to have varied from province to province . . . And where this greatness (*virtù*) was first gathered in Assyria, and then among the Medes, and in Persia, so eventually it passed to Italy and to Rome: and if since the Roman Empire there has been no lasting dominion established, nevertheless one sees greatness to have been scattered throughout many nations; as it was in the reign of the Franks, the reign of the Turks, that of the Soldan; and to-day among the peoples of Germany . . .'

Here follows one of the periodic tirades against the corruption of contemporary Italy, in contrast to the German world, of which Machiavelli had so idyllic an impression. This corruption is attributed primarily to the temporal struggles of the Popes, and secondly to the effeminacy of the Christian religion, setting a premium on humility and other-worldliness, where pagan religions prized worldly courage and *virtù*.<sup>22</sup>

Most of the classical history discussed in the three Books of the *Discourses* now concerns the apparently unending crises of the Roman republic in her struggle to preserve herself from 'corruption.' One of her mainstays is held to have been her religion, 'a thing altogether necessary in maintaining a

civilization.’<sup>23</sup> From what follows it transpires that the religion here referred to is a state-cult based on convenient superstition and ceremonies<sup>24</sup>—and this is the only religion ever discussed, although we know as a fact that Machiavelli died a practising Catholic.

Rome relied for the preservation of her imperial glory on good laws, and on good religion, but in the last analysis on the inherent goodness of her citizens, their native *virtù*. We have already seen how this *virtù* leading her on to expansion and wealth bears with it the seeds of its own corruption, and how this works in with the cyclic, up-and-down idea in history.

But here again we have hardly come up against what seems a stable philosophic concept than it becomes necessary to modify it profoundly. For Machiavelli, as a potentially active politician, is a partisan in developments. He now finds himself on the under-side of the wheel in the historic process, and he wants to climb up, feels there should be a way up, a short cut, but, realist that he is, he knows that his efforts are useless. This is the explanation both of those extraordinary bursts of idealism, such as the tirade against Cæsarism,<sup>25</sup> or the last chapter of the *Prince*, and also of the profound pessimism and despair, which appear from time to time in his work. Let us continue to unwind the thread of his history.

Inevitably Rome will end in corruption. Machiavelli recognizes this on his general showing, and yet in detail he is desperately unwilling to let it happen. In his search for precepts what he is really looking for are absolute rules for political conduct, he has a fumbling belief that if he could only muster a sufficient number he would be able to short-circuit the whole contemporary process, bringing Italy back into the path of ancient *virtù*. Towards the end of the *Discourses* he begins to feel that this quest is endless and therefore hopeless, it is impossible to foresee and forestall all accidents—the final chapter opens with what is really an admission of this defeat. Yet when the inevitable does happen he is furious and indignant. Historically, of course, Cæsar marked both the end of Roman liberties and therefore the beginning of her decline, and the height of her glory. But Machiavelli will only recognize the former:

‘Let no man be deceived by the renown of Cæsar, above all, on hearing him celebrated by writers; for those that praise him are corrupted by his fortune.’<sup>25</sup>

He then goes on to describe the afflictions of Italy under the Emperors, this develops into another tirade against contemporary corruption—and the blame for all this is laid on Cæsar! What Machiavelli would have had Cæsar do was to arrest the cyclic development:

‘ And truly a prince in search of worldly glory might wish to possess a corrupt city, not to destroy her entirely as did Cæsar, but to reform her as did Romulus.’<sup>25</sup>

When we contrast this with the several passages relevant to the inevitability of decay, it is evident that this was wishful thinking. And the Cæsar who should act as Romulus was, of course, the same ideal personage as that at the back of the author’s mind in composing the *Prince*.

The decadence of Rome, then, after Cæsar has become a fact. And the corruption of Italy, and to an only slighter extent of France and Spain—where open corruption is staved off by good ordinances<sup>26</sup>—is attributed to her downfall. The only places where the ancient *virtù* is now found are among the Germans,<sup>26</sup> the Swiss,<sup>27</sup> the English,<sup>28</sup> and possibly the Turks. The logical outcome for Machiavelli of such a view would have been to set patriotism aside and align himself with the redeeming conqueror, but this obviously was impossible, and his life itself was a valiant struggle against such an outcome. His dilemma becomes clear if we compare him with Spengler, whose view of history is evidently similar, but with the important difference that Spengler’s admiration of the earth-and-blood virtues of tribal Germany did not clash with his natural patriotism, so that there was no obstacle to his becoming the official prophet of Nazi Germany. Machiavelli was in the position of a modern Frenchman such as Céline: emotions and intelligence opposed, so that a purely intellectual solution was impossible—and modern anti-semiticism had not been invented.

For Machiavelli insists in a number of passages on the one-way character of the process of corruption,<sup>29</sup> and adds:

‘ One may make this observation that where the material is uncorrupted, tumults and other scandals are not prejudicial: where it is corrupted, good laws are of no avail, unless they are effected by one who with extreme vigour enforces their

observance, so that the material is made good. *Whether this has ever been the case I know not, nor whether it is possible that it should come about.*' (italics mine).

But if Rome had such unremitting crises in maintaining her liberty and succumbed in the end in spite of her early freedom and many prudent counsellors, what wonder if in other cities less fortunate in their origins 'such difficulties arise that they can never be reformed?'<sup>30</sup> And more specifically what hope is there for Florence, born in servitude and corrupted throughout, before she even became her own mistress,

'and so has gone muddling on for two hundred years . . . without ever becoming such that she might really be called a republic?'<sup>30</sup>

Moreover, elsewhere Machiavelli places Florence and Venice, accustomed to a certain measure of liberty, in a category above Milan, Rome and Naples, who have no experience of any rule except tyranny, and 'it is as difficult and dangerous to wish to liberate a people wanting to live in slavery, as to wish to enslave a people wanting to live in liberty'<sup>31</sup>—so for Italy as a whole there could be slight hope of that liberation Machiavelli so ardently desired. It is with the painful acceptance of this reality that begins that melancholy and finally despairing quest to find a policy embodying the lesser evil.

In general, as his life and the bulk of the *Discourses* show, Machiavelli favoured republican government. This resulted from no loose theory of humanitarianism: it rested on a profound pessimism as regards the nature of man:

'It is necessary for him who wishes to ordain a republic . . . to presuppose all men to be wicked, and that they will use the malice of their being, wherever they have free occasion . . . '<sup>32</sup>

Certain passages in the *Discourses*<sup>33</sup> seem at first sight to imply a Shakespearean contempt of the 'mob,' which has allowed some modern critics, such as Mussolini, to associate Machiavelli with the more violently anti-democratic opinions, but how superficial this view is can be shown in a number of places, where the author clarifies his attitude to popular rule. In his view all men are

supremely prone to err, and this generalization embraces not simply those who are governed, but also, and above all, those who govern, unless they are held fast in the road of *virtù* by good ordinances, as the kings of contemporary France or Spain, or by the primitive *virtù* of the community, as in early Rome or contemporary Germany. Taking as his text Livy's statement, affirmed by 'all the other historians': 'Nothing to be more inconstant than the multitude.' Machiavelli proceeds to uphold the contrary, and this launches into a panegyric in favour of the natural wisdom of a people against the natural wisdom of a prince, in which the actions of both are compared over a number of points and everywhere sounder judgment comes from the people:

'In the elections of magistrates they make far more judicious choice than princes; nor is it ever possible to persuade them to advance a man of corrupt and infamous character: which yet is an easy and common thing with princes . . .

'And not without reason is the saying "*Vox populi vox Dei*": for it is seen that the body of the people do marvellous things in their prognostications; so that it seems as if by hidden virtue they foresee their own evil and good.'<sup>34</sup>

This last passage must not be forgotten in computing the change in political thought from Machiavelli to Montesquieu and Rousseau.

But Machiavelli did not advocate popular government without sarcastically criticizing its inefficiency in crisis,<sup>35</sup> and insisting on the necessity of dictatorial powers at times.<sup>36</sup> In Rome such powers were given for short periods and with elaborate safeguards against their abuse, and Venice, 'the most excellent of modern republics,'<sup>38</sup> had a similar provision for empowering a small body of citizens to act without general consultation. In a weak republic such measures may lead to tyranny, but in any case a crisis is likely to produce either tyranny, or ruin: in Rome tyranny rose under the name of dictatorship, but not because of it—'for it is forces that easily acquire names, not names forces.'<sup>36</sup>

But if ever a country, a whole civilization, was in a state of crisis, surely Italy was so at the end of the Renaissance. And here we are led on to consider the real meaning of the *Prince*.

## VI.

The main features of the *Prince* should have emerged from the argument of the foregoing sections. I think it is possible in a critical reading of the *Discourses* to gather all that Machiavelli has to give in the way of political wisdom. I have mentioned the fundamental interest in the mechanism of government, and how this sometimes leads to discussing both the republican and autocratic viewpoint on an identical problem. The body of the *Prince* consists in a selection of the relevant material solely from the latter point of view, and in the ordering of this in the form of a treatise, 'useful to him who understands it.'<sup>37</sup> As a treatise, it gains over the discursive commentary in the precision and strength of its texture, and, embodying already the athletic vigour of Machiavelli's reasoning, its prose style is understandably held by Italian critics for one of the peak-points in their literature.

Remains the so-called enigma of the *Prince*. We need hardly consider the old-fashioned cry of horror concerning the 'monstrous' methods advocated by Machiavelli. We who have been brought up in the politics of the post-war period will find nothing odd in these: Machiavelli would certainly have applauded the British government's policy of promising Palestine (1) to the Arabs, (2) to the Jews, (3) to British imperial interests, and keeping none of these promises, or only those parts of them which remained profitable, when the circumstances that made the original promises worth while had disappeared. Similarly, Machiavelli would have agreed with the use made of religion by the 'Patriots' in Spain, although he would have vigorously criticized their employment of mercenaries and foreign troops. And if anyone assert the sincerity of all these dealings, surely Freud's contribution to modern thought has made the boundary line between sincerity and insincerity a very shadowy one indeed, depending in the last analysis on the individual's capacity for self-deception—here be it readily admitted that English politicians are a long way in advance of the Italians whether of the Renaissance or of to-day. So that the means advocated by Machiavelli towards a given end are as relevant now as ever. Moralistic criticism rests, of course, on the belief that there is no distinction between private and state morality.

I have indicated how the whole trend of Machiavelli's approach to history, as embodied in the *Discourses*, leads finally to the

expedient of the glorious Prince in contemporary Italy, who should come 'not to ruin the state, as did Cæsar, but to re-create it, as did Romulus.' Once national redemption was achieved, Machiavelli presumably hoped it would give way to some form of mixed government, either by the expulsion of the rulers, as in ancient Rome, or by a more gradual evolution, such as that envisaged in the *Discourse over the Reform of Florence* (1519), in which he put forward an elaborate plan for the Medici to maintain absolute power in the city during their lifetime, while providing for its reversion to a republic on their death.<sup>38</sup> In life Machiavelli was, in spite of all his realism, a fervent idealist to the end, and I have tried to show what element there is of wishful thinking in certain parts of his work. It is impossible to avoid making this charge—for all its moving eloquence—against the last chapter of the *Prince*. There is absolutely nothing in what we know of either of the young Medici to whom it was alternately addressed to indicate any likelihood of their succeeding, where Cæsar Borgia had failed; and Machiavelli who knew so well how to size up the character and political wisdom of men from the nature of their actions, could not have been unaware of this. The dedication and concluding address of the *Prince* was far more an expression of the author's private idealism than of any external reality in Renaissance Italy.

## NOTES.

- <sup>1</sup>*Discourses* Book I, Chapter 12. <sup>2</sup>*Lettere familiari* (Ed. Alvisi, Firenze, 1883) Letter CXXXVII (Quoted in full by Morley). <sup>3</sup>See *Discourses* III, 30. <sup>4</sup>See *Discourses* I, 10. <sup>5</sup>*Prince* VII. <sup>6</sup>*Prince* XXV. <sup>15</sup>*Discourses* III, 30. <sup>16</sup>*Discourses* II, 27. <sup>17</sup>*Discourses* I 40, Cf. also I, 30. <sup>18</sup>*Discourses* III, 40. <sup>19</sup>*Discourses* I, 26. <sup>20</sup>See *Discourses* III, 22. <sup>21</sup>See *Discourses* I, 2, and immediately following chapters; but the idea recurs throughout. <sup>22</sup>*Discourses* II, 2. <sup>23</sup>*Discourses* I, 11. <sup>24</sup>See *Discourses* I, 12. <sup>25</sup>*Discourses* I, 10. <sup>26</sup>*Discourses* I, 55; I, 58. <sup>27</sup>See *Discourses* I, 12. <sup>28</sup>See *Discourses* I, 21. <sup>29</sup>Notably, *Discourses* I, 17. <sup>30</sup>*Discourses* I, 49. <sup>31</sup>*Discourses* III, 8. <sup>32</sup>*Discourses* I, 3. <sup>33</sup>Notably I, 53. <sup>34</sup>*Discourses* I, 58. <sup>35</sup>*Discourses* II, 33. <sup>36</sup>*Discourses* I, 34. <sup>37</sup>*Prince* Chapter XV. <sup>38</sup>See also *Discourses* I, 9 and I, 2.

# CLASSICS AND EDUCATION

## A NOTE

SOME years ago there was given out in these pages a challenge to describe the place that the study of Latin and Greek might profitably occupy in a revised education. Since that challenge has not been taken up by competent hands it may not be out of place to sketch some of the features which might figure in an effective answer, and at the same time to indicate why such an answer is at the present moment unlikely to be made.

The defence which has been put up for the Classics in the past was drafted to resist the encroachment of 'Modern' studies, and for such purposes it was reasonably adequate. A liberal education involved the cultivation of the humane values, and the Humanities were their repository. Now the situation is changed. For if the main arguments of *Why Universities?* (see *Scrutiny*, Vol. III, No. 2) are accepted, the ground is cut from under the defenders' feet. The claims of English (as defined in the article mentioned) as the humane study *par excellence* are much stronger than ever before. (There is an able page or two on this in George Sampson's *English for the English*). For Latin and Greek literature can never take such an intimate place in the life and thought of our age as was possible as late as the eighteenth century.

Though any claim for the Classics can only be for a subordinate rôle in a general education, it will rest naturally on the literature of the two languages. The language as such cannot be seriously defended. The writing of Latin and Greek verse and prose which occupies so large a part in school curricula to-day does not do anything which could not be done better by other methods. As 'discipline' or as giving insight into the structure and intricacies of the English language it cannot compare even with translation into Basic as expounded by Dr. Richards. Indeed a case can be made out against the practice of writing verse in that it inhibits



the appreciation of (say) Shakespeare or any characteristic English poetry which goes against the classical canons.<sup>1</sup>

The consequences of abandoning (in large measure) this side of current teaching are extensive. In the first place it involves a lowering of the standard of proficiency in the mastery of the languages. But this is only to recognize that the study of the Classics as a specialized subject must be distinguished from the cultivation of those languages as part of a general education. A similar distinction applies to all the subjects now generally taught. Radical as the reform would be, it is no more drastic than would be the reform of teaching in the natural sciences to fit them into a scheme of general education. In the second place greater reliance would have to be placed on translation. For if the literature is to be put in the place now given to the language much more ground

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<sup>1</sup>An interesting confirmation of this case comes to hand in the account of the Eton education by Cyril Connolly (*Enemies of Promise*, 'The Background of the Lilies,' Ch. xxii). 'Another field for the Pre-Raphaelite influence was in translating. Homer and Virgil were the pillars of an Eton education . . . we read them with the help of two official cribs, Butcher and Lang for Homer, Mackail for Virgil. Lang believed that Homer must be translated into the nearest English equivalent, which was an Anglo-Saxon prose reminiscent of the Sagas . . . and the Mediterranean clarity of the *Odyssey* was blurred, by a Wardour Street Nordic fog . . . Mackail, who had married William Morris's daughter, gave to his Virgil an eightyish air . . . To put it another way, a sensitive Etonian with a knowledge of Homer and Virgil through these translations, and a good ear, would be unable to detect in poems like *Tithonus*, *Ulysses*, or the *Lotus Eaters* any note foreign to the work of Homer and Virgil . . . Another effect was to associate English literature with Latin verses. We came to think of poetry in terms of tags and useful epithets, and to think of the best poetry as being in the form of the sonnet or sixteen-line lyric . . . No one who did his verses well wrote poetry afterwards. There would be one slim Eton-blue volume, with a few translations and a couple of epigrams, then silence. For the culture of the lilies, rooted in the past, divorced from reality, and dependent on a foreign tongue, was by nature sterile . . . We were not taught literature.'

must be covered than could be gone over (in school, at any rate) in laborious construing as it is at present conducted.

But even more than the literature (which at the moment offers serious difficulties to be discussed later on in this note) it is the two civilizations which offer the most profitable study. Some hints of the value of a study in broad outlines of Greek civilization as a 'norm,' and as a method of introducing the basic questions, the main positions from which a criticism of our own civilization can begin, are thrown out by Dr. Meiklejohn in his account of the remarkable experiment in liberal education he undertook at Winsconsin (see *Scrutiny*, Vol. I, No. 3). But useful as this work was, it was only a beginning. His method requires greater refinement and precision. In order to present coherently the elements of Greek or Roman civilization, a sound conception is needed of the quality of the literature which emerged from it and which gave it its character, as well as of the relation of this literature to the general conditions of living. Great progress has been made in describing the social, economic, political and philosophic aspects of these civilizations, but this central point has not yet been satisfactorily treated.

A simple example taken from Dr. Meiklejohn's book will indicate the general difficulty facing any attempts of this kind. He recommended his pupils to compare *Mourning becomes Electra* with the *Oresteia*. In principle this was sound. For our approach to the values of the past must be from the present. But the implied estimation of both works will hardly meet with approval. And all the textbooks and critical appreciations of Classical literature current in schools (and in universities for that matter) are open to the same objection. They are based on critical values which are not held by those competent to judge. The classic example is the translation of Euripides by Gilbert Murray. What Mr. Eliot has to say in his celebrated essay applies generally to the whole field of 'interpretation.'

The reasons for this generally admitted weakness are not far to seek. Mere scholarship does not provide the apparatus necessary for the cultivation of literary criticism. Adequate standards can only be derived from the present. Actually the strict business of evaluation is rarely performed, and then only perfunctorily. The general formula is nine-tenths biography, summary and paraphrase

of the works, and one-tenth of technical criticism. Exceptions to this description are generally of the over-personal impressionist school. Much, it is true, has been done to explain the principles the ancients themselves employed in judging their literature ; but this, though helpful, does not supersede the need to judge from contemporary standards.

No very helpful result, then, would emerge from a study of ancient literature with the aid of current textbooks and translations, as those who have done Adult Education work in this field will testify. A new approach is required, and until it is made the study will continue to produce an attitude on the whole hostile to contemporary literature. On the other hand the situation is not unfavourable. For the present age though far from being Periclean or Augustan is in much greater sympathy with the outlook of the ancient world than was the case at the end of the nineteenth century. Moreover the advances made in criticism and above all the work of Mr. Eliot as critic and poet have made possible the assimilation of much more of the classical world than was possible before.

But what is most needed is the appearance of translators who will render in the modern idiom the poetry of the past. Too much stress has been laid on the ' timeless ' quality of the classics. They can only be of quickening service in so far as they can appear modern. Unfortunately we cannot expect that as in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries poets will turn to translation as a way of expressing their modernity, in spite of the interesting work of Eliot and Pound. On the other hand the current verse technique as shown by these two poets is sufficiently flexible to undertake this task.

Such very briefly is the situation to-day. If this description is broadly accurate, nothing very much can be done except on the margins to turn Classical teaching to profit. And once again we may reflect that no other subject in the average public or secondary school is in better case. The teacher can here and there give a hint, but until a better critical approach is available the amount of time and money spent on the teaching of the Classics will remain largely unjustified.

H. A. MASON.

## MARLOWE'S 'DR. FAUSTUS'

THE final scene in *Dr. Faustus* is more often than not treated as irrelevant to the play. In it, says one critic, 'Marlowe committed apostasy'; that is, he reversed completely the purposes and principles that had hitherto governed his writing. And as these purposes and principles are approved, one of two conclusions follows: either that the final scene is the product of a Marlowe in decline; or that he wrote it, at the best, as an exercise; at the worst as a joke, with his tongue in his cheek. There is another critic who says: 'The alternative of a happy solution lies close at hand. It is only a lingering taste for the lurid and the horrible, ingrained in this sort of melodrama, that sends Faustus shrieking to hell.'

To both it would seem possible to reply that no scene of such excellence—and the excellence, so far as I know, is not denied—could issue from anyone who was not both capable of and actually exerting his powers to the utmost. But this perhaps assumes as premiss a belief about life and literature which, though acknowledged outside *Scrutiny*, is not generally used as such. Therefore it is advisable to fall back on a reply that can be verified from the words of the text; and to claim that, so far from being disconnected from its predecessors, the final scene refers to them continually and is continually referred to by them.

The man who is 'sent shrieking to hell' is one who previously had vaunted:

Thinkst thou that Faustus is so fond, to imagine  
That after this life there is any pain?  
Tush, these are trifles and meere olde wives tales.

Whereas his ambition had been to

. . . make man to live eternally,  
Or being dead, raise them to life againe,

he is, in the last scene, reduced to lament that he cannot die:

Or, why is this immortall that thou hast?  
 Ah *Pythagoras metemscosis*, were that true.  
 This soule should flie from me, and I be changde  
 Unto some brutish beast: al beasts are happy,  
 For when they die,  
 Their soules are soone dissolved in elements,  
 But mine must live . . .

He finds it impossible to be rid of his soul:

Why wert thou not a creature wanting soule?

whereas before he had thought nothing easier than to throw it away:

Had I as many soules as there be starres,  
 Ide give them all for *Mephastophilis*.

Or again:

. . . Heres the scrowle  
 Wherein thou hast given thy soule to *Lucifer*.  
 —I, and body too, but what of that?

And so on: it would be possible, in illustration of this point, to transcribe whole pages of dialogue. But it is perhaps superfluous to do so, and relevant quotation will in any case be necessary later.

These references backward, once recognized, improve, I think, the last scene, however impressive in itself; and that the earlier scenes are improved by it, goes without saying. By them the play is knit into a firm if simple structure, of which it is still possible, in spite of a mutilated text, to trace the main outlines. I shall at least attempt to do so in this paper.

But first it will be necessary to discuss other and, I am afraid, more general topics. For the play makes extensive use of a system of ideas which is no longer widely familiar; and it cannot be recalled by the brief hints which, as sufficient in his time, are all that Marlowe provides.

Pared of its comic scenes, and of the not very serious ones first published in 1616, the play cannot, according to a common opinion, be interpreted wholly realistically. It is not merely a photograph, showing beings who exist side by side to influence one another. A large measure of the action takes place not so much between beings as within a single one of them, Faustus

himself ; of whom the Good and the Evil Angel, for example, are parts. And so, I would add, are the Old Man, Helen, Mephistophilis, even Lucifer ; in a certain sense, which I shall endeavour to explain below, they are parts of Faustus. The play in other words is an allegory.

Yet obviously the Good and the Evil Angel, Helen and the rest are not merely parts of Faustus. The two angels are emissaries of powers, or representatives of orders, independent of himself ; while Helen, though a shade, is more than a figment of his imagination. Hence it would appear that allegory does not altogether exclude realism ; or perhaps better, that when as excellent as Marlowe's it inevitably employs realism as an instrument. For if compared with other types, its excellence will be found to be precisely this : that it is neither a puzzle, in which things are given an interest by being called other than their proper names ; nor is it a scientific analysis, in which various aspects of a thing are isolated for their reader's comprehension. I would say rather that it is a synthesis, rendering comprehension not so much more ready as more full.

Marlowe chooses certain characters so as to be capable of at least a double function : they are significant as symbols, in virtue of what they symbolize ; but significant also as themselves, in virtue of what they are. And they are not significant now as the one thing, now as the other, by a sort of alternation ; but continuously and simultaneously, as both. That they can be so, it is at least plausible to assume, is due to an affinity, or to a partial or potential identity, between what they are and what they symbolize. If the latter, establishment of the identity will be the synthesis effected. In a sense two things are distinct, and this must be acknowledged ; but in a sense also they are one, and unless this is acknowledged, they cannot fully be understood, even in the sense in which they are distinct.

The Good Angel, for example, is the representative of an order or goodness, independent of Faustus in that it is not affected whether he is loyal to it or not. He can no more increase or diminish its perfection, than he can create or destroy it. But at the same time the Angel symbolizes a part of Faustus ; and may do both because, though the converse is true, Faustus is by no means independent of the order. Only by loyalty can he attain his own perfection and therefore peace ; if disloyal, he is tormented by regret for the

perfection he has sacrificed. And so, whatever the goodness or badness of his life, the order is vindicated in him: he is evidence of it, a part of it—and to be identified with it, in this sense. But there is also a sense in which he must be kept distinct; for whereas the order's perfection is compatible with any life he may choose, only one, a good one, is compatible with his own.

All this is what the Good Angel, by multiplicity of function, is able to signify. As much Faustus as, say, reason or the power of thought, he supplies the latter, when he is loyal, with an occasion for rejoicing; if otherwise, self-reproach is as inevitable as thought. But at the same time he is none the less an angel, and as such not subject to Faustus's control: he cannot for example, as thought might, be silenced from time to time and ultimately be forgotten. So that joy and sorrow are not merely, or rather in this sense not at all, selected by Faustus for himself, according to what instinct of propriety he may possess: he suffers a sorrow which is inflicted, he receives a joy which is bestowed. Yet again, all that he receives or suffers in this way, since it comes from the Good Angel or from what the Angel represents, is in conformity with and so to speak demanded by his nature: of which the Angel continues as much as ever a part. And thus a synthesis is suggested by the allegory: that Faustus's life, though single and indivisible, is both his own and not his own. On the one hand he alone can lead it, and he cannot do other than lead it, to his profit or to his loss; on the other hand however led, it is the intimate concern of, as it is intimately concerned with, what is other than himself.

In much the same way Helen is the lust of the eyes and of the flesh, both as these are objects in an external world, other than Faustus; and as they are his own passions, leading him to seek within those objects a happiness. As both, she is able to signify that, by his nature, he is bound to the objects in one relation or another; inevitably they are part of his living. But the consequences of any relation are determined by the objects as distinct from his nature; and so there is a sense in which he and Helen must be distinct. While the Good Angel, at least as substantial as he, could ensure a lasting happiness; that proffered by Helen can be no more than momentary, for she is hardly substantial—she is a shade.

An allegorical interpretation of this kind should not perhaps

be limited to space but extended also to time. I mean that, just as the spatial distinction between Faustus and the Good Angel is accepted as to some extent, though not wholly, a device (for while distinct, the two in another sense are one): so also should the temporal separation between his death and his signing of the contract. The one event follows the other after a period of twenty-four years, and the period is significant as itself; but also, I think, it is symbolical of the moment of signing. Or rather, of the moment at which Faustus determines to sign: for at that moment, and without delay, he plunges to spiritual death. He kills his soul, which does not need twenty-four years to weaken or to wither. But as death, whether spiritual or physical, does not annihilate a soul, the consequences of the determination to sign, though arriving within are not confined to a moment. Without the intervention of grace they will stretch through eternity, and can therefore be represented, if at all, only under some figure of time. And this is the purpose of the twenty-four years: which as has been said are significant as themselves—but are so only that a single moment may be the more adequately symbolized. To accomplish his purpose Marlowe might be said to write a play of which the hero is both alive and not alive. He appears to be working out as best he can his salvation, and in a sense he is doing so; but there is another sense in which he is working out neither his salvation nor his damnation. He is damned already.

Recognition of both these allegories, and that they are of complicated rather than simple type, is I think necessary to remove obstacles to the reader's enjoyment. For if it is not made, various absurdities arise which are incompatible with the reputation the play is felt to deserve. If for example the two Angels are accepted merely in their symbolical sense, as parts of Faustus, they are nothing but ideals or aspirations opposing one another within his brain. To one or other he must attach himself, but it is not yet obvious which; meanwhile he must behave impartially to both, since both are his offspring. And the two must argue for his allegiance; with the result that, as Mr. Santayana says, 'the Good Angel . . . seems to have the worst of it.' But if this is so, the last scene is not only irrelevant, it is contradictory of all that precedes; and no criticism of it could be too severe. A happy ending was demanded, to justify the sound



decision of an umpire ; and this Marlowe, through malice or perversity, refuses to provide.

If on the other hand the Angels are accepted as at the same time angels ; as representatives, that is, of orders established in a universe outside Faustus : it cannot appear doubtful even for a moment which of them should be followed. For Faustus is submitted to the universe as its creature, though a free one ; and it is precisely to express this submission that he is symbolized by the Angels at all. Of these it is assumed—or rather, it would be assumed by an Elizabethan audience—that good dominates evil, so to speak absorbs it, and subordinates the ends of evil to ends of its own. Therefore there is no hope of Faustus cutting loose from what the Good Angel represents : by refusing to co-operate with it however insistently he can only prepare for himself a future punishment—and this is a form of involuntary co-operation.

On other grounds it might be said that argument is not even possible. For Faustus, no more than another man, could be argued into a choice of evil as evil. The sole problem, given the Angels as an objective evil and an objective good, is not which of them ought to be followed ; but which of them will be followed in fact, and what the consequences will be.

These are to some extent displayed by behaviour on the part of the Angels which, if at first sight it might be taken for argument, is in reality very different. It will be remembered that the consequences, though they immediately supervene, are for their fuller comprehension spread over twenty-four years. Faustus is allowed to explore evil with all patience and all diligence ; so that, if it does not bring happiness, the fact after such an experiment shall be more convincing ; if on the other hand it brings misery, the contrast with what appeared happiness for a time shall be the sharper. During the whole of the twenty-four years each of the Angels continues in his double role : as part of Faustus, expressing his preoccupations ; and as external agent, either encouraging those preoccupations or seeking to end them. As both, the Evil Angel and his associates—for he is not considered profitably, apart from the devils—are inevitably more prominent in the earlier scenes. Evil is a new toy, on which Faustus cannot cease to ponder ; nor can he resist any invitations to evil that he may receive. If it is impossible the Good Angel should be silenced, he may at any rate

be reduced to single lines and general warnings, such as are easily ignored.

Sweet Faustus, thinke of heaven and heavenly things.

—No Faustus, thinke of honor and of wealth.

—Of wealth,

Why the signiory of Embden shall be mine.

This is not an argument, by which Faustus or anyone is to be persuaded that evil is better than good ; but a mere statement or illustration of the fact that, once Faustus has chosen evil, he has neither eyes nor ears save for the immediate advantages of having done so.

The gifts of the devil however neither satisfy nor last. Power and wealth, all that Faustus hitherto has obtained, are not in themselves either bad or good ; and so long as they are contemplated merely, he need not be disturbed. But once the attempt is made to use them, disillusion begins. In his inexperience he thinks that, having sold himself into hell, he will be allowed to retain a portion of his integrity : to seize the opportunity, for example, of new found wealth, to set up an orderly household. Therefore he asks for a wife, and one is brought. But she proves stuffed with fireworks and goes up in smoke :

A plague on her for a hote whore,

he cries, and must henceforth content himself with the ' fairest curtezans.'

Thus his fleshly desires are satisfied, *tant bien que mal* ; but the result is that his spiritual desires, as they are the more isolated, become the more insistent. The devil, having already supplied a book of spells, of planets and of herbs, is summoned to dispute of ' divine astrologie.' The joy of learning, however, is no more permissible to Faustus than that of domestic bliss ; for if pursued in due order and in the proper temper, it can lead to one thing only—the knowledge, the love and ultimately the vision of God. And all these, along with goodness, he has renounced. By a process of reasoning which resembles, and is probably intended to recall, the scholastic argument *a contingentia*, Faustus ascends from a consideration of the planets to that of the moving Intelligences ; and thence to the supreme Intelligence which is the origin and mover of all.

Tell me who made the world?

he asks, but can receive no answer. The whole economy of hell is disturbed; Lucifer appears with his 'companion prince,' Beelzebub, and 'looking terrible' imposes silence. But as Faustus's mind cannot be left completely vacant there is offered him, as a substitute for the vision of God, that of the seven deadly sins. He watches with detachment, but not without interest; for if he is moved to no protest against their loathsomeness, he exchanges quips with one or two. And at the end he exclaims:

O this feedes my soule.

—Tut Faustus, in hel is al manner of delight.

—O might I see hel, and return againe, how happy were I then?

At this point he has fallen victim to a vice familiar to the Fathers and to the schoolmen, but rarely mentioned as such today: that of curiosity. 'Whereas the voluptuous man,' says Augustine, 'seeks after what is beautiful, melodious, sweet or smooth, the curious man seeks after the very opposites of these; not however that he may be vexed by them, but merely out of the lust to experience and to know.' This is Faustus's case: the seven sins do not move him as they would an ordinary man, and as a man should be moved. He has begun to collect sensations without judgment and without order, not as an aid to right living but merely for their own sake. And the further descent from curiosity of the senses to that of the intellect is easy. 'No longer'—to quote Augustine once again—'is nature explored only so far as is necessary to see the eternal through the temporal,' but ransacked in all its corners for the quicker compassing of 'false and earthly happiness, empty and worldly distinction.' With the magazines of science which Faustus now accumulates, he is out of the danger of knowing God; he is on the other hand the better qualified to tease Popes, oblige Duchesses and entertain Emperors.

In the passage from which the last quotation comes, and also elsewhere, Augustine connects curiosity with the conjuring and worship of devils. It is not only this which leads to the suspicion that he, or at least his doctrines, had a strong influence on *Dr. Faustus* (a direct influence I mean, and not only by way of the *Faustbook*;

for as will be apparent now or later, I think Marlowe abandons the theology of the *Faustbook* for one which is more humane, as it is more traditional). That the unbounded appetite for experience or for learning was a discovery of the Renaissance is a superstition common amongst commentators: it had however been known long before, and in particular to Augustine—who was seduced into Manichaeism by the promise he would no longer need to believe, but should know; and who had, in his own magnificent image, the ‘sun and moon served up to him in a dish,’ but found the food unsustaining. What was new in the Renaissance was the neglect of the boundaries within which, as had been taught by considered experience, this appetite must be guided if it were not to lead to disaster. And thus if any step was taken by Marlowe’s contemporaries it was backward (in this matter at least) rather than forward. Marlowe also may have taken the step in *Tamburlaine*, and it seems probable that he did; but if so, he was seeking in *Dr. Faustus* to recover lost ground as speedily as possible. For evidence in support of this it is necessary to consider only the verse of the two plays, especially of the death scenes. They cannot be held—or rather they should not be held, for it seems they often are—to be mere repetitions one of another in *dispari materia*: the latter is immeasurably more mature. It is indeed fully mature, while the other, like the Renaissance in so many aspects, is no more than adolescent.

But this is a digression. The eternal, which we left Faustus neglecting, in the end cannot but avenge itself; for its only rival must sooner or later vanish, leaving an open field. By the choice of evil Faustus has forfeited not only spiritual but physical integrity, such as in the allegory is destroyed by the passage of time. An Old Man (‘base and crooked age,’ that is *Senectus*) reminds him of this. Unable to deny it he is as never before seized with fury against an agent of good, and asks for him to be tormented. But in vain: for Mephistophilis is powerless against one who, unlike Faustus, has laid fast hold on the eternal:

My faith, vile hel, shall triumph over thee.  
 Ambitious fiends, see how the heavens smiles  
 At your repulse, and laughs your state to scorn.  
 Hence hel, for hence I flie unto my God.

Faustus on the contrary has nowhere to fly but to what remains

of his youth ; the more fleeting as youth itself is a shadow. Helen plays *Juventus*, and it is of her that he is driven to beg

Sweet *Helen*, make me immortal with a kiss ;

meaning thereby not that he himself—for to his misfortune, he is immortal already—but that what remains of youth, the present moment, shall not pass away. By the nature of things this is impossible ; the twenty-four years draw to a close and before the allegory ends the last gift of the Evil Angel—for which in turn all others have been sacrificed, and all that might have come from any other source—has already crumbled in his hands.

As the attractiveness of evil gradually declines, that of good grows in inverse proportion. For it is eternal and therefore remains to draw Faustus's eyes when, the mists of evil dissolved, they are left hungry for an object. Thus the more prominent role which in the earlier scenes fell to the Evil Angel, is in the later assumed by the Good Angel and his associates: the Old Man and Faustus's own conscience. The latter, who once confined the Good Angel to the briefest of utterances, in the penultimate scene is himself forced to exclaim at length :

What wonders I have done al *Germany* can witness, yea all the world, for which *Faustus* hath lost both *Germany*, and the world, yea heaven it selfe, heaven the seate of God the throne of the blessed, the kingdome of joy, and must remain in hel for ever, hel, ah, hel for ever, sweete friends, what shall become of *Faustus*, being in hel for ever? . . . Ah Gentlemen! I gave my soule for my cunning.—God forbid.—God forbade it indeed, but *Faustus* hath done it: for vaine pleasure of 24. yeares hath *Faustus* lost eternall joy and felicitie.

The Good Angel 'gets the best of it' after all ; for he or his allies speak last and, as this is not an argument but a history, he who speaks last wins.

Having forfeited the good, Faustus's knowledge of it is of course in no sense full ; still, there is a degree of which he cannot be rid, sufficient to feed a regret which is his chief torment in eternity. According to Mephistophilis it is also the torment of the

devils, who nevertheless do not lack diligence in or affection to evil. The two therefore—the regret and the affection—are not incompatible ; and this notion may perhaps be of use in removing what appears another misunderstanding of Mr. Santayana's.

'The excellent Faustus,' he complains, ' . . . is browbeaten by the devil and forbidden to repent when he has actually repented.' But if so the play, as containing a contradiction, could hardly be taken seriously ; or at least, no more seriously than its source the *Faustbook*, to which Mr. Santayana's words more certainly apply. Even admirers of the latter would perhaps admit this to be a mistake ; and there is I think in the play, over and above what there is in the book, something which Mr. Santayana overlooks—once again, the allegories. In so far as Marlowe's Faustus is damned, and as he is living on earth only to exemplify in part the sufferings of the damned, he has identified himself with the devils as far as he possibly can. And he is kept to hell, or to association with evil, exactly as they are: not by browbeatings and prohibitions, but by his own free will. For they have an affection to evil ; they have so formed or deformed themselves that they can desire only what secures them misery. Had they for example the opportunity to escape from hell they would not take it ; though it is a place only of suffering, such as comes from the loss of heaven. Rather than not have heaven in hell where alone it is impossible, they would not have it at all. A state of violent discord and disorder similar to this exists in Faustus's soul. And this is what passages like the following, which Mr. Santayana has in mind, are intended to convey allegorically. It is not only Lucifer who drags a reluctant Faustus from thoughts of heaven :

Ah Christ my Saviour,

Seeke to save distressed Faustus soule.

—Christ cannot save thy soule, for he is just,

Thers none but I have intrest in the same.

—O who art thou that lookst so terrible?

—I am Lucifer . . .

We come to tell thee thou dost injure us.

Thou talkst of Christ, contrary to thy promise :

Thou shouldst not thinke of God, thinke of the devil,

And of his dame too.

Faustus also drags himself. For Lucifer, like the Good Angel, is here playing a double role: he is devil, but also he is part of Faustus, who is thus agent as well as victim in his own torment. And an interpretation of this kind should always I think be made whenever, at first sight, it appears that Faustus's moral freedom is being infringed. It is not, for example, only Lucifer and Beelzebub who forbid him to continue the study of 'astrologie'; it is his own evil will, which has already determined not to embrace the truths to which astrology is leading. To do this he has to exert violence on himself, not inaptly represented by a disturbance in hell; principally he has to sink deeper into hell, or to reveal a greater depth of evil in himself than has yet appeared. And as has been seen, this is what he does.

It is of course impossible to get a clear conception of his state; eternity is full of contradictions, so is evil, and little perspicuity is to be expected of a notion that combines the two. But Marlowe comes perhaps as near to a forcible expression of it as possible. Because of its complication his allegory is so to speak more than an allegory: one picture is not substituted for and therefore weakened by another; two pictures are retained, to give each other strength. Faustus suffers not merely *as though* he were struggling with an outside enemy, he has such an enemy; not merely *as though* he were torn within, he is so torn. And against Lucifer he must struggle with the persistence called for against himself: against himself with the violence for which Lucifer calls. The whole of his strength seems to lie on both sides of the struggle and therefore he is indeed, as he says, torn as by devils. But he should also add that he had an affection to the devils which tears equally.

The temporal allegory is effective in a very similar way. We can conceive of pain or sorrow persisting at its acutest only in the hope that one day it will cease: otherwise it must either blunt itself, or wear out its possessor. As he is alive Faustus has hope, and therefore pain of this intensity:

Ah Christ my Saviour,  
Seeke to save distressed Faustus soule.

But at the same time he has no hope, for he is dead:

I am Lucifer . . .

Thou talkst of Christ contrary to thy promise,  
. . . thinke of the devil.

This does not of course mean that he unites contradictories in himself, as life and death ; but that, since his life illustrates his death, he must be conceived as continuing after death to suffer the utmost that, in life, he has ever suffered. Yet the one condition, that of hope, has disappeared, which as far as our experience goes makes such suffering supportable.

It should perhaps be further noted that the allegories not only provide material and machinery for the body of the play, but shape it. It begins with a monologue, for example, and ends with one: as Faustus alone can commit the act for which he is to be punished, he enters alone to commit it so that responsibility shall be clear. He alone can endure the punishment, and is therefore left alone to meet it. But between these two points the stage is crowded with figures who, if they cannot commit may influence the act ; or if not influence, may be influenced by it: the more fully to exhibit its nature and its workings. Only towards the end the stage thins out, and Faustus is left alone with his Scholars. They are little more than conveniences, to allow him to soliloquize in public: the solitude which he dreads nevertheless pursuing him, and so to speak commanding him to itself out of society. Similarly with the allegory of time. In the body of the play scene succeeds scene, not indeed in any order, but in one which is more of psychological than chronological significance. They are like tableaux, illustrating the possibly simultaneous aspects of a man's state of soul, rather than events in his history. But towards the end references to time begin to multiply: Faustus must back to Wittenberg, he must nurse his complacency with a ' quiet sleep,' soon sleep will not suffice and he is driven to riot and debauch. In the final monologue a clock is on the stage, faster than ordinary clocks ; its second half-hour is shorter than its first ; and Faustus's imagery, now seeking to halt time, now yielding to it in despair, only succeeds in making it fly the faster:

The starres moove stil, time runs, the clocke wil strike,  
The diuel wil come, and Faustus must be damnd.



The general effect is that he is rushing upon his doom. And very much the same effect, it will be suggested below, is given by the opening monologue: in which he rushes on the act from which the doom results. In both cases the intention would appear to be the same: to create the impression of asymptotic approaches to single points of time, both of supreme importance to the play. From the one, as the consequences of an act committed in it, the whole play issues; into the other, where the consequences are resumed, the whole play is absorbed. There is however more according to one sense of the temporal allegory both points are the same, for the consequences follow immediately upon the act. And thus the play is not only symmetrical, it has the form of a closed circle; it ends where it begins; it leaves Faustus when and as it found him. It might be compared to a spring which rushes from the ground; spreads into a pool for awhile, to allow of inspection; then withdraws as rapidly into its source.

Little space has I am afraid been left for a topic of major importance: what is the nature of the sinful act which Faustus commits. But this cannot be neglected, as it is both the strongest bond between the last scene and its predecessors, and decisive for the character of the play. I will treat it as expeditiously as possible.

The sin is pride which, according to theologians, is the form and fount of all other sin. Moreover Faustus commits it formally, that is deliberately, without the shadow of an excuse or reason save his will to do so. That is, it is not one of the sins committed in actual life, where some excuse in however small a measure is always to be found. Rather it is an abstract from them all, sin it might be said in its essence. Taking this as its theme the play is to be called not only, as hitherto, an allegory; but a morality.

Possible excuses, did Faustus possess them, would be passion or ignorance. By one or the other, as they may take a man's actions out of his power, his moral responsibility may be diminished or totally abolished. But Faustus, in his first sixty-five lines shows himself without a trace of either. He does not mention lusts of the flesh; he is free from that of gold, for he dismisses it as 'external trash'; and from that of worldly honours, all of which, if he has desired them, he has enjoyed. And he enjoys them no longer; they are now a vanity to him, and he longs for something more.

This might of course be taken as a sign that about him ambition of some kind or other still lurks. It is however of so undetermined a nature—to the reader it is described only by negatives, as not addressed to gold, not to forensic glory, and so on—that it is hardly to be considered a passion. Rather it is an impulse to activity in general, to life itself, and without it Faustus would cease to be recognizable in any way as a human being. Even in the monologue as it stands, it must I think be confessed that he is only just recognizable: for an impulse of this kind, which though urgent is not clearly or even dimly conscious of a goal, would seem mechanical rather than human. It is machines, not men that function without some idea of an end. And hence no doubt the mechanical qualities of the verse:

Is to dispute well, Logickes chieftest end?  
 Affords this Art no greater myracle?  
 Then read no more, thou hast attained that end:  
 A greater subject fitteth *Faustus* wit . . .

and so on. It is direct, it is economical, above all it is not inappropriate to this part of the play. But it is the price which a morality has to pay for immediate and universal relevance, that in certain aspects it appears machine-like and gaunt; for detail must as far as possible be neglected.

As for ignorance, Faustus is past master in all the arts, from logic to jurisprudence, which are useful in earthly and human affairs. He has achieved astounding success; and decides, reviewing them one by one, that none of them has anything to give him any more. Therefore it is not among them that he will find a goal to which to direct his impulse to activity. The only goal left, it seems, is that of affairs not of this earth: the supernatural rather than the natural:

When all is done, Divinitie is best.

Opening '*Jerome's Bible*' he finds, as his first lesson in the supernatural, '*Stipendium peccati mors est.*' There is, he learns, such a possibility as that man should sin, and sin humiliates man in death. He recoils from the lesson:

The reward of sin is death: thats hard.

As yet however he does not reject it ; and his exclamation, though irrelevant as it would be to any statement of fact, can be taken as an example of a sort of reluctance which is familiar. For a moment the acceptance of something is postponed which, it is well known, must be accepted sooner or later. But what Faustus goes on to read does more than state a possibility, it inflicts humiliation upon him : '*Si peccasse negamus, fallimur.*' As all men have sinned Faustus has sinned, and he is already involved in death. This he rejects outright, preferring his own idea of what a fact is or should be to what, if he will open his eyes, he can see that it is (or such, at any rate, was the assumption of Marlowe and his audience). Thus he commits the sin of pride : the play has begun and, in one sense of the temporal allegory, at the same time ended.

His conscience protesting immediately, he seeks to conciliate it with the following sophism.

If we say we have no sinne,  
We deceive ourselves, and theres no truth in us.  
Why then belike  
We must sin, and so consequently die.

If it is true that he has sinned, he says to himself he was forced into it—it was his nature to sin, he could not help himself. And conscience being thus cleared, he has no need, in spite of the Bible's assertions, to be humble. And a further conclusion follows : that if any man has sinned, he too was forced into it ; if all men have done so, their nature is such as to have been designed for eternal destruction :

I, we must die an everlasting death :  
What doctrine call you this, Che sera, sera . . . ?

He may call it what he wishes, and it is certainly a revolting doctrine. But, rather than divinity, it is one which he has evolved for himself, by denying the basis on which all divinity rests : that sin is of its essence voluntary. But he insists on identifying the two so that, to a none too clear-sighted conscience, the rejection of divinity shall seem not only plausible but inevitable.

He no longer feels the need to review the sciences so that he may discover in what direction to employ himself. External authority denied, conscience put to sleep, there is no direction

which is forbidden, none which does not, at any rate at first glance, attract. Ceasing to profess the useful arts, he will become a magician and, in

. . . a world of profit and delight,  
Of power, of honor, of omnipotence

he will be, not only King or Emperor, but a 'mighty god.' By now the verse has lost its mechanism, has begun to move with the easy enthusiasms of *Tamburlaine*: through the door of pride the passions have begun to invade Faustus, and he welcomes every one.

The rapidity of movement in this prologue, already referred to, may now perhaps be appreciated. Only nine lines are given to the crisis: four to the reading of the Bible preliminary to the act of pride, five to the apology which follows it; the act itself falling between the two groups, and being mentioned in no line. If this seems a dramatic defect, it should be reflected that, as has been said, Faustus's sin has not the shadow of an excuse. It is not the result of suasion but a pure act of the will (such as can be conceived only by abstraction) and the will turns to evil. As such the act cannot be analysed or understood: for only if it were excusable could we trace it to an origin, place ourselves at the point of view of doer, and see how—however much we deplored it—'he came to do what he did.' In so far as anything is evil, it cannot be explained by those who recognize it as such. Marlowe therefore can do no more than observe the act of pride, mark it as it occurs, then proceed to what is his chief interest: the narration of its consequences.

These include many similar acts, which, were they not its consequences, would be equally inexplicable: Faustus's consenting to be fobbed off with 'curtezans,' his acceptance of the vision of sin instead of that of God, his appeal to Helen—as though there were a chance of its success—for immortality. The tragedy of life, as presented by Marlowe in this play, is that it may be riddled with acts like these. But more striking are the occasions when Faustus—chiefly at the instance of Mephistophilis, who seems detailed for the purpose—repeats the original act in an ever grosser form.

Yet one of Mephistophilis's first speeches is no other than a rebuke to pride:

Did not my conjuring speeches raise thee? speak.

—That was the cause, but yet per accident.

For when we hear one rack the name of God,  
Abjure the scriptures, and his Saviour Christ,  
Wee flie, in hope to get his glorious soule.

Faustus might learn, if he would listen, that far from receiving the omnipotence with which he flattered himself, and from freeing himself from the necessity of humiliation: there are still conditions to which he must be humbled, he is to receive nothing but at a price. And further he might reflect that, as his soul is capable of glory, it is capable of sin and damnation. But both suggestions are brushed aside; the price, he makes it clear, is to him as little as no price, for men's souls are 'vaine trifles.' These or similar words he repeats on all occasions when Mephistophilis—it almost seems of set purpose to disabuse him—bids him consider the bargain he wishes to conclude:

But may I raise up spirits when I please? . . .

Then there's enough for ten thousand soules.

Though informed in all frankness that he receives diabolic visits only that he may be dragged down to hell, and that Lucifer shows him favour in order to make him a *socium doloris*, he protests defiantly, 'Come, I thinke hell's a fable.'

This word damnation terrifies not him,

he says of himself:

For he confounds hell in Elizium.

His ghost will be with the old Philosophers . . .

Such is his pride, his refusal to bow to external authority of any kind, that even on the world of spirits, of which he has no experience, he maintains his own opinion against that of one who has come direct from thence; and whom he is talking to at all, only because he believes him to have done so.

This wilful blindness, this pertinacity in self-deception, is brought out most clearly in the passage in which he enquires about

the fate of Lucifer. The 'prince of devils,' he is told, fell (as he himself is falling) 'by aspiring pride and insolence.' 'And what are,' he goes on, 'you that live with Lucifer?' Mephistophilis replies:

Unhappy spirits that fell with *Lucifer*,  
Conspir'd against our God with *Lucifer*,  
And are for ever damnd with *Lucifer*.

Almost inarticulate with rage or grief, he can do little more than repeat the name which is for him the sum of both. In reply to the next question, 'Where are you damn'd?' he can force out only two words: 'In hel.' But Faustus, insensitive to all things since he is so to his own good, continues the cross-examination

How comes it then that thou art out of hel?

Mephistophilis bursts into lines which, in their context and by contrast with the broken utterances which have gone before, are among the most eloquent in the play:

Why this is hel, nor am I out of it:  
Thinkst thou that I who say the face of God,  
And tasted the eternal joyes of heaven,  
Am not tormented with ten thousand hels,  
In being depriv'd of everlasting blisse?  
O *Faustus*, leave these frivolous demands,  
Which strike a terror to my fainting soule.

Even Faustus it seems must be impressed. But no: with a coxcombry which may arouse either hatred or contempt he mocks:

What, is great *Mephistophilis* so passionate? . . .  
Learne thou of *Faustus* manly fortitude,  
And scorne those joyes thou never shalt possesse.

It is as though a man, meeting another who had barely escaped from an accident with his life, informed him of a conviction that fire does not burn, stones do not crush, nor metals maim.

In this passage, as it may not seem wholly in place in a tragedy, Marlowe may be rehearsing the 'savage farce' of *The Jew of Malta*.

The two plays are however closely related, and a touch of the manner of the one is perhaps not only admissible, but necessary to point the other. Both have as their theme the ghastly folly which is sin: but whereas in *The Jew*, being for the moment out of patience with mankind, Marlowe is concerned to express only the folly, what principally moves his interest in *Dr. Faustus* is still the ghastliness.

This is developed through one sin after another, following their generation as it has already been traced from the momentary, inexplicable, but undeniable beginning. It is completed and concentrated in the final scene; in which Faustus having proclaimed he is not terrified by 'the word damnation,' is overwhelmed by the thing; having scorned Mephistophilis's prophecy that experience would change his mind, is compelled to cower in abjection for the prophecy to be fulfilled. The Elizabethan audience—if I may refer to it again—expected it to be fulfilled, and would have been outraged had it not been so. And so I think would any reader, however little in sympathy with the ideas in the play, if only able to see the ideas which are there.

Many readers have not been able, blinded chiefly by the prejudices of the nineteenth century. It is surprising how many even detailed opinions about Marlowe's Faustus, which are obviously incorrect once they are inquired into, are equally obviously correct of the Faust of Goethe. The one figure has been obscured, identified with the other. But he is of quite a different mettle: he does not spring from a world in which all that matters is action or enterprise, the more violent, the more inconsiderate, the better:

Säume nicht, dich zu erdreisten,  
Wenn die Menge zaudernd schweift—

but rather from that world from which springs also Dante's Bertran de Born. The latter had not been over-considerate in action, but was humiliated by rather than proud of the fact. If he had a scrap of Bertran's virtue—but alas! he has none—Faustus might repeat with him:

così s'osserva in me lo contrapasso.

JAMES SMITH.

## EDMUND RUBBRA AND SYMPHONIC FORM<sup>1</sup>

ONE has only to read Shaw's brilliant musical journalism in order to realize how, by the end of the nineteenth century, English musical culture had sunk to its nadir. The disintegrating process, the crumbling deliquescence, had been, I suppose, practically continuous since about 1750 ; and if a great original genius like Elgar survived it, he too offered no reorientation, no hope for the future.

Yet the renaissance *has* come, the reorientation has been accomplished ; and though it is difficult to separate cause from effect we may at least say that the reorientation is as it were symbolized in the work of three men: Vaughan Williams as musicologist and creative artist ; Cecil Sharp as rescuer, melodramatically in the nick of time, of our great tradition of folk-music ; and Sir Richard Terry as rediscoverer and performer of the inexhaustible riches of the music of Tudor England. It is difficult to over-estimate the debt that English music to-day owes to these three men who re-established the continuity of the traditions of our musical culture. They made it possible for England to produce, perhaps belatedly, in Delius her own great artist of the elegiac, of the twilight of romanticism ; later they made it possible for Walton and Lambert to reconcile the jazz distortions and agitations of the contemporary scene with something of the lyrical flexibility of the Elizabethans, the aristocratic gravity of Purcell, the more massive good sense of Boyce, and, in Walton's case, with the ' noble ' lyricism of the Edwardian Elgar also ; while Vaughan Williams himself has produced in recent years, as the culmination of his early experimentalism, those magnificent works—in which the richness of our past is implicit in an austere immediate present—that give him a position of such commanding authority in the history of British culture. At a time when artists have so little

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<sup>1</sup>The first two paragraphs and a few scattered phrases of this essay have already appeared in an article on recent British music which I contributed to *The Listener*.



reason to congratulate themselves on their relation to the society that ought to succour them, these men have at least made it less exhaustingly difficult for genius to bring its imaginings to fruition.

Consider the case of Edmund Rubbra, whom I don't hesitate to call, in a small way, a genius. When I heard the first performance of his *Symphony No. 1* I was convinced immediately that here was a man with something individual and interesting to say and with the ability to say it clearly and without pretension. With the exception of the Vaughan Williams of *Job* and of a few subsequent works, of the Warlock of *The Curlew* and of van Dieren and Delius, who are dead and whose music can hardly, anyway, be claimed as representatively English, Rubbra seems to me the most genuinely original musical mind which twentieth-century England has produced. Probably the improved conditions of our musical life occasioned by the English renaissance to some extent sanctioned his development as a creative artist, yet it may be unhesitatingly said that his is the one example of music by a contemporary British composer that borrows nothing directly from Vaughan Williams or from van Dieren or Holst or from any composer of the past, however deep his spiritual affinity with certain aspects of the music of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries may be ; of music the technical traits of which cannot be discussed in terms of 'influence' at all but have their ultimate justification in themselves ; of music in which the idiom and the ways of feeling are one and completely unprecedented, being the work of that *rara avis* of our or most other times, an original genius.

Rubbra seems to me for this reason a more remarkable composer than the more successful and perhaps more easily appreciated Walton, whom I would call not so much a genius as a man of very great talent. Walton has not, I think, a really original mind. His idiom is basically conventional, vivified by a few quirks of manner, some of which are genuinely individual (such as the note of *malizia*, abrupt, brutish and bristling), some of which are borrowed or modified from other composers (from Purcell or Elgar for example). I do not wish to deny the value of Walton's achievement. He is a brilliant naturally endowed musician and his *Symphony* is a landmark in English musical history, though I fancy it will look less impressively conspicuous in twenty years'

time. Yet this distinction between genius and talent seems to me worth labouring because I think it might be argued that, musically accomplished as the best works of Walton such as the Symphony or the Viola Concerto may be, nonetheless Walton's is an idiom that is made, whereas Rubbra's is an idiom that is, as it were, born, whose minutest detail is an organic growth. I do not, for instance, think that Rubbra would be capable of composing music as significantly bad as Walton's *In Honour of the City of London*, an (admittedly commissioned) work in which the composer mechanically exploits, in the 'continental' manner of Bliss, certain of his own mannerisms which have proved most superficially 'effective.' If Rubbra's invention fails him, as it does at times in, say, the *Phantasy* for two violins and piano, it does not imply any failure of authenticity; it is rather a failure in clarity of communication and the music becomes, not less authentically original, but merely comparatively awkward and crabbed.

Like all true originality, however, Rubbra's is consistent with tradition, and both originality and traditionalism are equally unselfconscious. His work has none of that deliberate regressive anglophilism which mars the earlier music of Vaughan Williams, though of course it was only by means of such conscious deliberation that Vaughan Williams was able to effect so intrinsic a change in British musical history and to create those late compositions whose native virility is as powerful as it is effortless. Primarily Rubbra's idiom is a melodic one, and his lines are extraordinarily alert and sensitive, with a strange quality of precariousness, which is technically incarnated in their tendency to push tonality to the utmost limits while remaining basically secure, and of latency, which finds idiomatic manifestation in the unusual and subtle key- or rather tonal-relationships existing between the developing phrases of the lyrical themes; (for Rubbra's music cannot be said, in the conventional sense, to 'modulate'). This is a melodic speech that is fundamentally vocal, the lines being long and asymmetrical, accentuated in accordance with the natural rhythms of the human singing voice.<sup>1</sup> Like van Dieren's, it is thus closer

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<sup>1</sup>On reading this, Rubbra told me that while composing he conceives his themes in such powerfully vocal terms as sometimes to produce, in his mind, a vision of a human figure actually singing them.

to the melodic sense of the music of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries than to that of the eighteenth and nineteenth where the basic rhythms are those of the classical symphonic form which derive from the dance rather than from the human voice ; but Rubbra's spiritual affinities are specifically with *English* music of the sixteenth century whereas van Dieren is essentially European and cosmopolitan, and there is, of course, no resemblance between the melodic idioms of the two composers—Rubbra's comparatively austere and energetic, van Dieren's poignantly sensuous and comparatively chromatic—except the general one of similarity of approach and method. If one considers Rubbra's vocal music one sees how closely the nervous contour of the lines—neither diatonic nor modal yet appertaining to both since he is above all a lyrical composer and lyricism cannot properly exist outside the range of a stable tonality—is associated with the natural accentuation of the rhythms of the English language.

In the *Spenser Sonnets* for tenor and and string quartet there is a wonderful equilibrium between lyrical flexibility and the claims of the spoken word. Thus in the setting of Sonnet XLIII phrases such as 'choked with overflowing gall' or even single words such as 'pleading' or 'humility' give rise to a glowing efflorescence, sometimes accompanied by a singular shift of tonality, in a lyrical line that is conceived in fluid phrases of enormous span, moulded to the rhythms and inflexions of the human singing voice. Note also in Sonnet II, how subtly the speech rhythms are played off against the lyricism in the phrase 'And seeke some succour both to ease my smart,' how poignant is the effect of the tritone on the words 'afflicted mood' and of the falling diminished seventh (across the bar-rhythm) on 'breake forth' ; and note how all these expressive devices arise directly from the verbal text and yet are inseparable from the proud arching contour of the lines. The vocal lines in these Spenser sonnets would make a completely satisfying musical experience if sung by a solo voice without the quartet parts. There are few composers of the twentieth century about whose melodies a similar claim could be substantiated.

In the way in which the emotional associations of words or phrases give rise to ardently expressive configurations and shifts of tonality in the lyrical texture, as well as in the sustained power and rhythmic freedom of his melodies considered as wholes, Rubbra

is very close to the melodic principles of Byrd and Wilbye. His melodies are not, could not be, 'like' those of Wilbye or of Byrd, but they re-establish the contact with these composers that had been lost to English music since the time of Purcell, so that we see that the spiritual affinity of his music with that of the music of Tudor England is not a matter of influence at all but is the consequence of a native habit of mind. Even the lyrical flexibility of his writing for strings—as in the poised yet glowingly lyrical *Second Violin Sonata* or the *Fantasia* for violin and small orchestra—seems partly conditioned by his appreciation of the vocal qualities of his native language.<sup>1</sup> I think there is a similar relationship between the French language and the melodic lines of Gabriel Fauré, and it is a relationship that seems to me to be fundamental to all great lyrical music.

Since he is essentially a melodic composer it follows that Rubbra is also a contrapuntal one, for counterpoint is the inevitable

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<sup>1</sup>It is instructive in this connection to compare the nature of Byrd's vocal lines when he is setting English words to music (as in the *Great Service*) with the nature of them when he is setting Latin words (as in the *5 part Mass*). In both he manifests a superb command of vocal technique, but the lines in the *Great Service* are much bolder and more idiosyncratic, abounding in irregular rhythms and intervals. Although one must not put too much stress on particular examples, since the services of many English composers seem to have been sung indiscriminately to Latin or English words, yet there can, as a general principle, be little doubt that the daringness and ruggedness—the rhythmic complexities, the leaps of major sixths and ninths, the preference for accented passing notes and false relations—which we recognize as peculiarly characteristic of the polyphonic composers of sixteenth century England, compared with the suavity of the contemporary French and Italian schools, is largely due to the nature of the language spoken in sixteenth century England. (It is probable that English was then spoken with considerably more inflexion than it is to-day). And as a corollary of this we may mention the text-book commonplace that the mellifluousness of the Italian language conditions the fact that the tradition of Italian music has always been pre-eminently vocal and lyrical.

result of conceiving music in terms of melodic lines and from it all the great traditional polyhonic forms are evolved. It is Rubbra's mastery of contrapuntal forms—a mastery that is not of course a matter of technical exercise but of intense spiritual discipline—that is the external manifestation of the peculiar sanity, the mature and civilized impersonality, that we recognize as characteristic of his music even when it seems to deal—for he is, being essentially honest, as uncompromisingly a composer of the twentieth century as the Vaughan Williams of the F minor or the Walton of the B flat minor Symphony—in emotions of the most exacerbated ferocity. Rubbra's musical thought, though 'romantic,' is usually *instinctively* contrapuntal; the toughness of emotion which this toughness of craftsmanship represents—the fascinating complexity of his counterpoint, the potent independence of his parts—shows up the spurious virility of Hindemithology for what it is worth, and it is a freedom from flabbiness or excess which is as noticeable in the lucid delicacy of the lines of the fugal coda to the First Symphony as in the agile and vigorous rhythmic organization of the fugue that forms the penultimate movement to the *Sinfonia Concertante*. In the vocal works Rubbra's counterpoint is closest in spirit to that of Byrd and the great English polyphonists—one of the *Five Motets* is a superbly executed double canon. In the purely instrumental works he has obviously learned much from Bach, greatest of all contrapuntists, though again there is no question of influence involved. In either case it is music created with true artistic detachment, the product of a live mind, foolproof against ironic criticism.

These close-woven melodic lines, combined together with such contrapuntal virtuosity, produce harmonies as proudly individual as is the sinewy contour of the lines. Although the harmony often sounds extremely harsh and complex the chords which are employed are seldom very elaborate or chromatic in themselves, being composed mainly of simple triads and bare fourths and fifths polyphonically juxtaposed in such a variety of ways and in such subtle combinations as to give an impression of the most diversified expressiveness and of a kind of rich austerity. In this respect Rubbra's harmonic sense also has affinities with that of the sixteenth century polyphonists, for the dramatic effectiveness and vividness of, say, Byrd's harmonies is entirely to be attributed to the virile

independence of his lines and rhythms. Some of Rubbra's cadences especially—in the *Spenser Sonnets* as well as in the *Five Motets*—have a flavour distinctly evocative of the cadential clichés of the sixteenth century, but again we do not feel that it is at all a matter of pastiche but rather of consanguinity of mind and of respect for the natural principles of vocal melodic construction.

The most uncompromising harmonic harshness is justified if it is polyphonically logical ; and in Rubbra's purely vocal works such as the *Motets* the powerful harmonic effect is quite inseparable from the individual rhythms and structural flexibility of the melodic line. Thus in the setting of Donne's great *Hymn to God the Father* the slowing up of the rhythm, the leap, in the soprano parts, of a minor sixth and then the semitonal fall, on the words ' For I have more ' are wonderfully expressive as concomitants of the vocal line at the same time as they produce the poignant dissonant harmony ; and in the magnificent passage beginning ' I have a sinne of feare that when I have spunne ' we may note how the anguished discord on ' feare ' emerges with exquisite fluidity in the melodic lines from the muffled repeated notes (on a simple minor triad) of the preceding bar ; how the harmonic catch-in-the-breath on ' last thred ' has its counterpart in the quivering resilience of the slowed-up rhythm ; how the altos and tenors cling in triplet rhythm to the persistent A flat minor triad while the basses, in bare fifths, fall chromatically until, the altos suddenly leaping through an eloquent augmented second, they create a bitter cry of despair on the word ' shore ' ; how then the sopranos enter with their triumphant repeated Es on ' Sweare by thyself that at my death ' until the whole choir swells in translucent major triad harmonies. In passages like this it is impossible to conceive of the harmonic effect apart from the contour of the individual lines that produce it ; and although the harmonic *relations* are elaborate and original the staple harmonic material depends on the primary triads and their inversions just as it did in the music of the sixteenth century.

In compositions which employ instrumental as well as or instead of vocal resources Rubbra does not disdain homophonic principles, but his harmonies are always fluidly shifting and are never conceived statically. By merging independent lines and flowing harmonies which are in themselves quite simple Rubbra sometimes achieves sonorous effects not altogether distinct from the peculiar astringent

piquancy which characterizes the harmonies of the early (more Schönbergian) work of van Dieren. Superficially there may not seem to be much resemblance ; Rubbra's is the more patently masculine mind and, I suppose, the less profound ; yet no composer of to-day has approached more nearly to the bitter-sweet tragedy of the delicate intertwining of lines which make up van Dieren's *Chinese Symphony*, the piano *Sketches*, and the *Cenci* song than does Rubbra in his works for chorus and orchestra *The Dark Night of the Soul* (words from Saint John of the Cross) and *O unwithered eagle void*—particularly the last named. Despite the highly wrought polyphonic texture the effect of this score, like that of the *Chinese Symphony*, is almost 'colouristic' ; and in his piano writing Rubbra will often alternate his typical terse contrapuntal treatment with a sonorous impressionistic arpeggio technique that reminds us, different as it is in temper and ethos, that the composer is an enthusiastic admirer of Debussy's keyboard music. Such arpeggio figurations are never, however, exploited for their own sake, but only as a background to the sustained lyrical line of a voice or solo instrument (*vide* the first movement of the Violin *Sonata No. 2*).

While Rubbra usually employs a method of free unsymmetrical rhythmic accentuation in accordance with the metres of the human voice his rhythmic sense is often simultaneously influenced by physical movement and the actions of the dance, and the nervously intense quality of his music is partly due to a kind of incessant dynamic friction between the lyrical plasticity of his interwoven 'vocal' melodic lines and the regularly periodic insistence of powerful, rhythmically opposed pedal-points. This peculiar feature of Rubbra's work is epitomized in *Prism*, music which he has recently composed expressly for dancing and which may be described as a sort of polyphonic-contrapuntal ballet ; (the score includes a double fugue on themes in contrasted rhythms worked out independently, a movement of masterly contrapuntal logic actively adapted to the motions of the dance). Even in some quite tranquil pieces such as the *Spenser Sonnet 2*, particularly the closing section, this dual frictional sense of simultaneously vocal and dynamic rhythm is pervasive, while it attains its most central manifestation in the Symphonies, and is the most important clue to an understanding of Rubbra's contribution to the problem of Symphonic Form.

To make a rough generalization one may say that up to about the middle of the seventeenth century art-music had been *primarily* vocal and its natural lines and rhythms those of the human voice. After that date the dance gained prominence, and with it emerged the diatonic key-system and the classical symphonic form. Of course these changes cannot be separated from the cultural drift of civilization ; but taking this into consideration it is hardly an exaggeration to say that this great diatonic system in which so much magnificent music has been created led eventually, through the preponderance of harmonic resource and the decay of the traditional polyphonic forms that it encouraged, to the starvation of melodic utterance. The efforts of the most interesting composers of the twentieth century—one thinks of such diverse artists as van Dieren, Busoni, Sibelius, Bartók, Janáček, Fauré, Roussel, Vaughan Williams and, as we have seen, Rubbra—have almost all tended towards the re-establishment of melodic utterance based on the rhythms of the human voice as the *modus vivendi* of the art of music. Yet the symphony is the pre-eminent form on which twentieth-century composers have been succoured, and the symphony, we have observed, has always been primarily homophonic. Is it possible—the question inevitably offers itself—to reconcile the principles of symphonic construction with the writing of free independent melodic lines? or, if the symphony is outmoded, can any other form be substituted for it?

Of course the problem has already been solved in the finale of the *Jupiter* symphony of Mozart, to whom most things indeed seem to have been possible. But this is an instance miraculous in its isolation ; and although fugal it is not quite a construction of ' free ' polyphonic lines. More recently we find, in the almost Palestrinian purity of Sibelius's Fourth, Sixth and Seventh symphonies, a distinct increase in subtlety of polyphonic organization accompanied by a slight though significant flavour of modality ; yet for all this Sibelius's symphonic form remains fundamentally homophonic and in some respects the product of a cultural ethos very different from that with which artists of the immediate future will, it is to be expected, have to contend. Sporadic attempts to reconcile symphonic form with polyphonic principles have tentatively been made by other contemporary composers such as Vaughan Williams, Walton and Roussel, but I believe that



Rubbra is the first composer to tackle the problem systematically, with full realization of the implications involved, and it seems to me a problem of immense importance with reference to the future of music.

The classical symphony, I have said, depended on the diatonic key-system, to which was attributable its characteristic construction of exposition, development and recapitulation. There is, then, one very obvious reason why the symphony of Rubbra cannot accept the classical symphonic form and that is because he does not accept the diatonic key-system ; the fact that his melodies are constructed in the ' free ' vocal manner of the sixteenth century rather than according to the formal patterns of the eighteenth century is a corollary of this. Rubbra adopts Rimsky-Korsakov's, of all people's, celebrated adage that good orchestration is simply good part writing with a literalness, an awareness of the consequences, that would have been beyond the Russian's comprehension ; but it is patent that with such an enormous diversity of parts as is obtained by allotting an independent melodic life to each instrument of the orchestra (except of course the percussion) chaos would result unless some contrapuntal means—some means other than that of the diatonic key-system—of achieving structural unity were arrived at. Rubbra achieves such unity by playing off the fluid contrapuntal evolution of his lyrical themes against the insistent building up, in a manner that is *cumulative and dynamic* in effect, of linear formulæ *which are derived from characteristic aspects or features of these themes*. The main lyrical melodies develop of their own volition, without regard to preconceived notions of what symphonic form ought to be, and in so doing inevitably generate subsidiary motives that provide the *contrast* which is essential to the construction of a large-scale movement—and which in the classical symphony is inherent in the diatonic key system—so that even parts which may intermittently seem to be fulfilling an unimportant or ' accompanying ' function nonetheless preserve the most closely wrought thematic unity.

In the first movement of *Symphony No. 1* there are two main lyrical themes, contrasted by very original and surprising tonal relationships, but connected. These themes are as it were dissected, each typical figure being subjected to the most exhaustive exploration. While the central lyrical themes are simultaneously

being contrapuntally extended in opposed rhythms, tiny figures derived from them such as the falling semitonal inflexion on the strong beat are developed with such uncompromising rigour and in such multiplicity of combinations as to produce—anchored as they are to one note or sequence of notes—an impression of agonized nervous energy. (A comparatively simple instance is provided by a passage beginning on page 40 of the full score). From this dissection of unsymmetrical plastic themes many counter-themes are evolved until the movement concludes with a progressive etiolation of the melodic material over a grim and ingenious pedal on C sharp.

The second movement, *Perigourdine*, is constructed in similar fashion though more simply since there is only one main theme, an eighteenth-century French dance tune which is itself comparatively straightforward and diatonic, although interspersed with the deceptive minor cadence characteristic of French folk-music. But the finest example of his method is provided by the long penultimate *Lento*, in which every detail of a melody of sustained poise and dignity is dissected and extended to produce a multitude of lyrical figures which, coagulating in a theme of the most serene gravity, become the subject of an elegiac fugal coda: the working out of this fugue is not merely a prodigious technical feat but a genuine spiritual consummation of all that has gone before.

The first movement of the *Symphony No. 2* begins with the full statement of an enormous sombrely intense melody given out unison by strings, horn and bassoon. From the contrapuntal extension and analysis of this emerges a second theme, more suave and gentle, and aspects of the two melodies are then played off against each other until they finally coalesce in a passage analogous to the recapitulation section of the conventional sonata form. In the *Scherzo* the process is reversed, the movement beginning with a series of linear fragments, some explosive and violent, others quietly intense, which are gradually built up into self-subsistent themes. (Sibelius sometimes uses a similar method, though he lavishes on it less contrapuntal resource).<sup>1</sup> In the *adagio*, perhaps the most

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<sup>1</sup>Compare Rubbra's original treatment of the concerto form in the *Fantasia* for violin and small orchestra. This work *starts* with the cadenza for the solo instrument and then gradually builds up the

proudly beautiful and moving passage in all Rubbra's orchestral work, a single meditative melody is extended in free polyphony, from which subsidiary phrases emerge, but the close formal logic—and also the atmosphere of nervous tension—of the movement is preserved by the insistence of a powerful pedal-point. The last movement is rather surprisingly a conventional Rondo, treated with great contrapuntal ingenuity. It is thematically and structurally in contrast with the other movements; emotionally it is, as it were, a stringently bitter epilogue, a commentary on the other movements, whereas the First Symphony moves irresistibly forwards to the fugal coda which is the climax and consummation of the whole work.

To construct a symphony, as does Rubbra, on polyphonic principles requires a sensibility of great originality and authenticity, for it is by his melodic utterance that a composer must stand or fall, here that he is least able to smother emotional crudity in artifice. In such a symphony 'orchestration,' for instance, cannot be made to do duty in lieu of intrinsic melodic life, because it cannot be conceived in terms of tone-colour at all but only with reference to the precise stress and degree of independence which, at a particular moment, is deemed apposite to a particular melodic line. I am inclined to think that Rubbra relies a little too much on the heavy brass for the clear demarcation of his more violent counterpoints, so that one's nervous resistance is occasionally worn down before a climax has exerted its full *musical*—its structurally and polyphonically logical—effect. The composer seems to be aware that this balance between the nervous and the musical impression constitutes a real problem, for in the *Symphony No. 3*, which is at present in embryonic form, he dispenses with the heavier brass and writes for a comparatively small orchestra. Of course the omission of the brass deprives Rubbra of the most obvious, the most sonorously vivid, method of outlining contrapuntal contrasts, and the comparatively level tone-colour of the more restricted medium makes the task of polyphonic-symphonic construction increasingly subtle: but Rubbra always seems to find

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'themes' from the polyphonic (or orchestral) extension of the 'motives' of the cadenza. The composition concludes with the statement of the 'main' theme in its complete form.

the greater stimulus the tougher is the technical nut to crack ; and if he has not yet achieved a formal perfection comparable with that of Sibelius's later symphonies in which idea and tone-colour are inseparable, we must remember that the technical problem he has set himself is intrinsically more complex. I certainly think that Rubbra's is the most important contribution to the problem of symphonic form that has been made since Sibelius, and that there is in his symphonies no phrase that is not sanctioned by intense emotional experience, no contrapuntal ingenuity that is not also an incarnation of life.

Most often it is, perhaps, a bitter, an unhappy, an angry rather than a tragic kind of life ; yet in its very honesty there is evidence of a search for a more satisfyingly reposeful attitude to experience, and we have the last movement, particularly the fugal coda, of the First Symphony, and the slow movement of the Second, to prove that the composer does not merely seek. ' Here is music,' says Mr. Eric Blom, ' of that classical quality, so rare in the music of to-day, of profound feeling perfectly disciplined.' I do not know a symphonic movement in twentieth-century music that approaches these in formal logic and emotional coherence except a few movements of Sibelius and Roussel. With the latter composer Rubbra has a certain consanguinity of outlook, though he is as fundamentally English as Roussel is French. The sustained melodies of both composers are ambiguous and complicated in tonality and betray a fondness for sinewy intense intervals such as the augmented second ; while the highly wrought polyphonic texture, the lucid sobriety of orchestration of Rubbra's symphonies represents the closest approach that English music can hope to make to that wise urbanity, seemingly the product of an age-long heritage of civilized living, which is most admirably epitomized in such late works of Roussel as the String Trio and the Third and Fourth Symphonies, though the French composer does not conceive the symphony in such consistently polyphonic terms. Rubbra's music does not, inevitably, share Roussel's peculiarly French and elegant distinction, but it is similarly civilized in its more energetic toughness, being essentially masculine music, unaffected and unafraid. For this reason it should be, apart from its intrinsic merit, one of the few lastingly valuable testaments of our times.

But if Rubbra's is a voice that we—I mean people of the modern world, particularly English people—ought surely to heed attentively, there is really little if any evidence to lead one to believe that even the reasonably responsible and intelligent people of England have much use for him. True, the improved conditions of our musical life have given one or two of his works a hearing, and there is goodwill in plenty prevalent in our musical circles ; the trouble is that it is goodwill without, or with the wrong sort of, direction. The enthusiastic reception accorded to Rubbra's First Symphony is somewhat discounted when one finds Moeran's Symphony likewise acclaimed as a composition ' of the first importance ' ; and the case is not an isolated one, but merely symptomatic, for how is one to explain away (for instance) the general acceptance of Bliss as a great composer, though he may be a clever musician ; the triumphant salutation of Dyson's recent Symphony, a work compound of unconscious reminiscence ; above all the acclamation of Lennox Berkeley's oratorio *Jonah* as a ' worthy successor ' to Walton's *Belshazzar's Feast*, a composition which although in my opinion among the least successful of Walton's achievements is obviously the work of a serious musician. I do not want to suggest that Moeran's Symphony is bad as the Berkeley is bad ; rather is it pathetic to see the composer endeavouring to keep ' up-to-date ' by peppering up a sensibility that was to begin with only second-hand etiolated Delius and early (Irishised) Vaughan Williams by indulging in pastiche of almost every composer who has made a personal contribution to English music during the last forty years ; (the attempts at Waltonian syncopations are peculiarly distressing). Yet the confusion of values that can hail the Moeran and the Rubbra symphonies *in the same terms* (one reviewer paid homage to Mr. Moeran's Symphony of Granite) is not a matter that can be dismissed as intrinsically comic, and it takes on a more sinister aspect still when we remember that the B.B.C. habitually perform Rubbra, if they notice him at all, in company with Benjamin Britten, Lennox Berkeley, Leighton Lucas and the rest of the motley. Two of these seem to me the ' continental ' type of music-maker who have drifted into musical careers by accident ; and if the Britten of *A Boy Was Born* once had a genuine if rather facile talent it has now been dissipated in a series of facetious exercises which

bump on the rock-bottom of bathos in the oh so clumsily clever clap-trap of the recent Piano *Concerto*.

Britten is yet another twentieth-century artist destroyed by the chief evil of our cultural life to-day—the formation, in default of solidarity, of clique and coterie. Rubbra has austere avoided contact with any such clique, either of the Britten-Berkeley-Auden-Isherwood type which depends on taking in (in both senses of the phrase) the outside world for the purposes of social and possibly material aggrandizement,<sup>1</sup> or of the van Dieren-Heseltine-Grey type which depends on shutting the outside world out, creating one's own mythology and one's own audience of friends and colleagues. Rubbra's magnificent integrity as an artist has been the safer for his austerity ; but he has to face the fact that he is therefore reduced to working in a social vacuum. He hasn't an audience that much wants to understand ; and how long an artist can continue to create without an audience to create for depends ultimately and unanswerably on the artist's toughness and virility. Rubbra's toughness and virility are certainly not in doubt, but his is indeed a heavy responsibility.

These are doleful speculations but it is well that we should indulge in them occasionally, lest we should grow complacent remembering how things are better than they were, how energetically we (with the B.B.C.'s collaboration) encourage our ' promising young composers.' I believe Rubbra is the most important living composer of his generation which this country has produced ; infrequently we commission him to write music for a ballet, to orchestrate someone else's music for a ballet, to compose some pieces for a pageant. The larger part of his full-scale orchestral, choral, and concerted works remains unpublished and unperformed.

A friend—a professional musician—to whom I communicated these opinions suggested that I was unduly pessimistic, that in circles where music is taken seriously it is tacitly (at least)

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<sup>1</sup>This group is indeed rapidly becoming indistinguishable from the world of our moth-eaten twentieth-century Everyman himself. After Messrs. Auden and MacNeice's trips to Iceland comes the exquisite consummation, and Mr. Benjamin Britten has written some beautifully modern music for Mr. Priestley's latest play about Time and the After-Life.

recognized that Rubbra is an artist of quite different stamp from the Brittens and Rawsthornes of the contemporary scene. Perhaps a tacit recognition is better than nothing, but it seems to recommend itself but feebly to the powers that be, for it is the Brittens and Rawsthornes that habitually get published and performed. And if they are enjoying a *succès d'estime*—a flash in the pan—one knows only too well that when their glitter is tarnished and their flash reduced to a glimmer it is not Rubbra who will supersede them but a fresher flash, the latest disciple of the I.S.C.M. There is one encouraging sign, and I have pleasure in concluding this article by congratulating Universal Edition (London) on having presented Rubbra with a contract. It is a belated step, but one in the right direction.

W. H. MELLERS.

LIST OF PRINCIPAL WORKS BY EDMUND RUBBRA  
(Compositions to which no publisher's name is allotted are in manuscript).

<i>Title</i>	<i>Opus No.</i>	<i>Publisher</i>
<i>The Secret Hymnody</i> for chorus and orchestra.	I	
<i>Sonata No. 1</i> for violin and piano	II	
<i>La Belle Dame Sans Merci</i> for chorus and orchestra.	12	
<i>Phantasy</i> for two violins and piano.	16	Oxford Press
<i>Phantasy</i> for string quartet and piano.	24	
<i>Triple Fugue</i> for orchestra.	25	
<i>Ballad of Tristram</i> for baritone and small orchestra.	26	
<i>Concerto</i> for piano and orchestra.	30	
<i>Sonata No. 2</i> for violin and piano.	31	Oxford Press
<i>Four Medieval Latin Lyrics</i> for chorus.	32	
<i>String Quartet No. 1</i>	35	
One-act opera <i>Bee bee bei</i> .	36	
Five unaccompanied <i>Motets</i> .	37	Augener
<i>Sinfonia Concertante</i> for piano and orchestra.	38	
<i>Fantasia</i> for violin and orchestra.	40	

<i>Title</i>	<i>Opus No.</i>	<i>Publisher</i>
<i>Two Poems</i> for choir and orchestra.	41	
Settings of ten <i>Spenser Sonnets</i> for voice and string quartet.	42 and 43	
<i>Symphony</i> No. 1.	44	Universal
<i>Symphony</i> No. 2.	45	Universal
Ballet <i>Prism</i> .	48	
<i>Farnaby Suite</i> for orchestra.	50	Universal
Unaccompanied madrigals.	51	

## COMMENTS AND REVIEWS

### THE BACKGROUND OF TWENTIETH CENTURY LETTERS

*A NUMBER OF PEOPLE*, by Sir Edward Marsh (Heinemann, 15/-).

*UNFORGOTTEN YEARS*, by Logan Pearsall Smith (Constable, 10/-).

*ENEMIES OF PROMISE*, by Cyril Connolly (Routledge, 10/6).

*MODERN POETRY*, by Louis MacNeice (Oxford, 7/6).

Sir Edward Marsh was the patron of the Georgian poets, Mr. Connolly is the co-mate of the post-war literary gang, Mr. MacNeice is a contributor to the contemporary poetic renaissance. Each has recently published a book about his circle. We have the socio-literary history of three phases for inspection, and may take the opportunity to draw some conclusions about the literary *milieu* of our age, the background of twentieth century letters. If you are inclined to think this a norm read the history of the same period in American letters, as recorded by Malcolm Cowley in *Exile's Return* and Lincoln Steffens in his autobiography. Sir Edward Marsh's picture has nothing in common with Steffens's, MacNeice's case-history of self and partners in no way resembles



Cowley's. No one could deny that the American history represents a healthy development, an evolution out of chaos and futility to a general recognition of standards and an agreement as to abiding values, in literary criticism. The 'critical' sections of the two later English books are depressing reading. Mr. Conolly's list of who's who in modern literature, his choice of the hopes for English literature and those whom he thinks are reviving imaginative writing, has to be read to be believed, and Mr. Connolly is an exceptionally able and bright-minded member of our higher journalism. However, the third section of his book, 'A Georgian Boyhood,' should be read carefully by literary critics as well as educationists: his account of the Eton education and its effect on taste and character—Eton standing for the English public-school system generally—offers a comprehensive answer to the questions raised by a comparison of these books with their American equivalents. The information he unconsciously gives about the relation between knowing the right people and getting accepted in advance of production as a literary value is even more useful than the analysis he consciously makes of the stultifying effects of an exclusively classical education conducted in an exclusively upper-class and male establishment.

Sir Edward Marsh's book raises all the questions. He is a beautiful specimen, a perfect litmus-paper without, as a literary critic, any individuality, personal taste or character. A classic at Westminster, he passed second in the Civil Service examination and thereafter, mixing as intensively as possible with the best people, he became an innocent blotting-paper to all literary aspirants he met in the right company, particularly good-looking young men with fetching manners. He was overwhelmed by Rupert Brooke, and after meeting Ivor Novello he became so impressed with the talents of the author of *Keep the Home Fires Burning* that he even took a passionate interest in musical comedy. It was his representative quality that enabled him to produce in the Georgian Poetry-Books something that went like hot-cakes (the second volume sold nineteen thousand). And as his classical education gave him an unshakable conception of what poetry ought to be, so his environment gave him no occasion to doubt his rightness of judgment. He still believes that 'Rupert Brooke is destined to remain as a considerable figure in English

Literature,' that Gordon Bottomley's and Lascelles Abercrombie's poetic dramas are great poetry, that Georgian poetry will soon be rehabilitated, and is confident of his own place beside Tottel (predicted by Gosse) for anthologizing it. He still feels how right he was to refuse in 1925 to have anything to do with the 'new directions' of English poetry (the only reference to Eliot's poetry is a silly joke) and it never occurs to him, any more than to Mr. Connolly, to question Mr. Desmond MacCarthy's right to refuse anyone else the right to criticize Milton—for both of them it is enough that he is an Etonian.

The same complacency, an inability to apply purely literary criticism to literature because of an unconscious acceptance of social values in this as in all other fields, is visible in Connolly almost equally, even though he sets out to account for his feeling that something is wrong somewhere. *The Waves* is a supreme work of art, Isherwood and Orwell are the coming great writers, 'The prose of Spender is also unusual, and in his critical book *The Destructive Element*, he makes a study of that great Mandarin, Henry James, which must affect the values of any contemporary who reads it.' I suppose it is because instead of knowing Mr. Spender personally I have been reading Henry James's novels for fifteen years that the only way in which his study affected me was as a botched-up piece of journalism by someone who had not only no capacity for examining James's novels critically but who had not even read them with ordinary care and intelligence. Though Mr. Connolly attacks the classical culture of Eton as 'by nature sterile' and though he protests against the College literary values of his time—the Victorian Romantic and the facetious in verse, Pre-Raphaelite prose—he does not think of questioning the social foundation of the world of letters. He ends his case-history: 'Since I was unable to write in any living language when I left Eton I was already on the way to being a critic. My ambition was to be a poet, but I could not succeed when poetry was immersed in the Georgian or neo-Tennysonian tradition . . . I was however well grounded enough to become a critic, and drifted into it through unemployability.' He does not apparently think this a criticism of the state of our literary journalism. But this does explain what has always puzzled some of us. Contemplating the literary reviewing we cannot help wondering how it is that these reviewers, who

know all the literary figures of their world, have had the most expensive education, and are not so overworked that they have no time to think if they wanted to, are not only unable to make first-hand judgments but also completely ignorant of informed opinion. Where did Mr. A get his reputation for brilliant wit, how is it that B's stuff is counted devastating satire, why does Miss C get respectful reviews, on what grounds could anyone assert Mrs. D's latest novel is worth serious attention? are questions that regularly recur to many readers of our literary weeklies, monthlies and even quarterlies. Mr. Connolly early on in his book observes: 'Critics in England do not accept bribes, but they discover one day that in a sense their whole life is an accepted bribe, a fabric of compromises based on personal relationships.' Sir Edward Marsh is incapable of such a reflection, but even as aware a man as Mr. Connolly does not seem able to see its full implications for literary criticism. He tells us how when he and his Eton set were faced with leaving College for the University the prospect seemed 'exhilarating and cosy, for, subject to a little permutation, the sentimental friendships from College continued unabated with undergraduates from other schools forming an audience, who, at a pinch, would contribute new blood to the cast.' A parable of the structure of our little world of letters. Skip a step and you see how it is that these elegant unemployables get into the higher journalism, and even the academic world, and how reputations are made—you have only to get the right people, whom you already know or can get introductions to, to write the right kind of thing about you in the right places. The odious spoilt little boys of Mr. Connolly's and so many others writers' schooldays—their education surely no less strange than that of the Nazi aristocracy as described by Erika Mann in *School for Barbarians*—move in a body up to the universities to become inane pretentious young men, and, still essentially unchanged, from there move into the literary quarters vacated by the last batch of their kind. Rupert Brooke in 1906 at Cambridge 'was in the set which filled the place that mine had held when I was "up"' writes Sir Edward. Mr. Connolly and his set expected to succeed Rupert Brooke's, and are now seeing to it that the literary preserves are kept exclusively for their friends. We who are in the habit of asking how such evidently unqualified reviewers as fill the literary weeklies ever got into the profession

need ask no longer. They turn out to have been 'the most fashionable boy in the school,' or to have had a feline charm or a sensual mouth and long eye-lashes. And in the creative field the same process is seen at work. The Oxford group moved naturally into the place left by Sir Edward's Georgians, to create the latest poetic renaissance, almost straight from school, and having no critical standards to reckon with, as we have seen, they have remained what they were at school. Hence Mr. MacNeice's account of his friends and their work reads like a book written by a schoolboy for schoolboys. 'Going to Germany soon after leaving Oxford, Auden took readily to post-War Germany's intellectual curiosity and spirit of heroic or idyllic Kameradschaft. He admires the cinema's unrivalled capacity for rapportage; Auden has always believed that a good writer must be first a good reporter. His poetry is obviously conditioned by his background and experiences, and also by his not unfriendly contempt for the female sex, whom he regards as still precluded from civilization by circumstances.' It is no use looking for growth or development or any addition to literature in such an adolescent hot-house. The one literary artist of serious performance, vitality and worth in the period covered by Sir Edward and Mr. Connolly was D. H. Lawrence. He imports the only jarring note into the former's memoirs, otherwise so happily studded with affectionate anecdotes of the best people in society and the arts. Lawrence is reported to have said that Eddie Marsh ought to have his bottom kicked (for his impudence in telling Lawrence that his poetry didn't scan—see the *Lawrence Letters*). Eddie records it serenely, for Lawrence was an outsider. The tone taken by the literary reviews at the time Lawrence required obituary notices is a testimonial to the success of the public-school-University hold over literary criticism. No one who ever read Lord David Cecil, for instance, on Lawrence can fail to appreciate that the achieved reputation of an outsider was felt as a personal insult by the people who run our literary world. Order is revealed among a chaotic puzzle of memories: we read in the paper that two young men are the likely candidates for the something literary prize or poetry medal, one being sponsored by Sir Edward Marsh and one by some other bigwig—neither would be sponsored by the literary critic; we could never before account for Mr. Connolly's write-up of Naomi

Mitchison's embarrassing bestseller *We Have Been Warned*; Sir Edward himself tells us how he was asked by the authorities whether Henry James ought to be given the Order of Merit, and instructed to find out whether Joyce ought to be given a Civil List Grant. Henry James got his O.M. on his death-bed after some trouble, but suppose it had been Lawrence (D. H.) or someone as unconventional and society-shunning as Walt Whitman? The gulf between disinterested opinion on contemporary literature and fashionable esteem is for a variety of reasons deplorable.

Mention of Walt Whitman brings us to the other book listed here, the memoirs of Logan Pearsall Smith. Mr. Smith was an American Quaker in the distant days before he settled down to become an English *littérateur*. Unlike Henry James and Mr. T. S. Eliot he sold his birthright for a mess of pottage, or more precisely the Paterian tradition of fine writing and the English social tradition of letters. The earlier parts of his book are good reading, for his origin provided him with a point of view and a fruitful background. His reminiscence of Walt Whitman is something that no one else in this galaxy could have been capable of setting down, and his criticism of the Balliol ethos of his time is correspondingly refreshing. But that was long ago. He is now as convinced as Eddie Marsh that modern poetry and modern prose are no good, and as sure as Rupert Brooke that style means decoration and stilts. 'This draught of Shakespeare's brewing—the potent wine that came to fill the great jewelled cup of words he fashioned,' he writes, and even in unimpassioned argument: 'There are two main methods of attaining excellence in writing, two ways of attempting to reach the peaks of Parnassus.' Responsibility for failure to develop his initial endowment must lie with the company he kept, which though it has always reviewed with extravagant praise his literary criticism and his creative efforts will never convince posterity that the *Trivia* are not boring or the monograph on Shakespeare not empty fine writing. The advantages Americans enjoy in having no Public School system, no ancient universities and no tradition of a closed literary society run on Civil Service lines, can hardly be exaggerated.

Q. D. LEAVIS.

## THE CENTRAL ALL-CONNECTING STUDY

*INTERPRETATION IN TEACHING*, by I. A. Richards (Kegan Paul, 18/-).

This book repeats and develops in greater detail the main arguments of *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*, and, consequently, is open to the same general criticisms as were passed on that book in a previous number. Indeed, looking back on the 'œuvre' of Dr. Richards, one can now detect certain common features which appear with varying prominence in almost all his books. Most striking are their extravagant pretensions, the air of being about to announce some staggering advance, combined with the failure to promote directly the business of criticism. Their most praiseworthy qualities, none the less useful for being negative, are the vigour with such rubbishy misconceptions that have cluttered up a subject for generations are finally swept away, and the exhilaration thus imparted to the reader in being given the feeling of making a fresh start. There is, however, a marked change in direction noticeable in his recent books. Whereas (notably in *Principles of Literary Criticism*) Dr. Richards was attempting to clear the way for criticism and to release the powers of poetry, his hopes for our salvation rest now on the study of Interpretation.

Dr. Richards approaches his task with optimism undimmed. 'The argument,' he writes in the preface to this book, 'from time to time looks forward to the general achievement—in a perhaps not very distant future—of levels of intelligence in interpretation higher than those yet reached.' And of the scope of this study of interpretation he writes, 'a deeper and more thorough study of our use of words is at every point a study of our ways of living. It touches all the modes of interpretative activity—in technique and in social intercourse—upon which civilizations depends.' But a characteristic ambiguity runs through the book. At one point he appears to be claiming that he has led us to the very threshold of revelation and that one step more will take up into the heart of the mystery, at the next we are whisked away to the perimeter where Dr. Richards is all modesty and self-depreciation. In treating of logic we are clearly in the realm of the tentative. 'What I am noting down here are, at best, only the materials of a possible teaching subject.' But later on he seems by implication to be

claiming the possession of considerable insight. 'With a well-managed circulation of a selection from the protocols I believe a class could in a few hours be given an insight into some extremely important matters involving every aspect of their practical conduct as well as their abstractive intellectual range.'

If we could ignore the claims put forward for the study of interpretation, the incessant beating of the drum outside the tent-flap, raising expectations which are never satisfied, and pass over the challenging asides with which the book is liberally sprinkled (Dr. Richards is still conducting his private sharp-shooting war with Philosophy) there is much in the book which is of positive, though limited value. On the subject 'words and their ways' a small volume could be extracted with profit. Extremely suggestive, for example, is the classification of the meanings of 'definite.' The approach to the difficulties of metaphor is helpful in a negative way. The intricacies of the word 'is' here unravelled do undoubtedly raise difficulties at all stages of education. In short, Dr. Richards' suggestions for a revised Rhetoric, Grammar and Logic might be introduced into schools as a valuable subsidiary subject.

But this would not do for Dr. Richards. Interpretation for him is 'the central all-connecting study,' and his book stands or falls by the success of this contention. Yet so great is his confidence in the strength of this claim, he does not bother to meet the objections which naturally occur to the reader concerned for the reorientation (to say no more) of education. Instead he proceeds directly 'under the kindly stimulus of the General Education Board' and offers this book ('written for teachers') 'as a Statement in the Application of the Theory of Interpretation to General Education.' It is a bulky work very uneven in value, and it gains some of its bulk from the inclusion of protocols garnered in a course of lectures delivered in 1935 in Cambridge. However useful they may have been in helping Dr. Richards to formulate his positions, they are not, it seems to me, really necessary to his exposition, an exposition intended for teachers. Unless (and one is seriously tempted to take it so) they were required as pegs on which to hang numerous homilies, intricate analyses, tips on education, some inspired, some trite, and far too many asides whose unfortunate tone is illustrated by the following:

introduced and have handed on, that apparatus upon which the whole weight of Western Culture has ever since been carried—no metaphysical abstruseness but the handy daily instruments of intelligence—how little of all this has reached—I won't say the ordinary reader—let me rather say the average reader of *The Criterion* and *The New Republic*.'

However difficult it may be (and as will be mentioned shortly there are special reasons for the difficulty) the main contention of *Interpretation in Teaching* calls for at least a short answer. Dr. Richards' imposing reputation gives weight to a view which if taken strictly is at once false and misleading. While recognizing 'how central the fact of language is' we must equally insist that a study of how it works must always be subordinate to the training in sensibility which will enable us to understand and use it. The study of language for its own sake is not only not enough, it may become a distraction, heading away from the central purposes of education.

How far this distinction needs to be pressed, and how far this book errs in neglecting it are points difficult to determine, for Dr. Richards is extremely able in appearing to get rid of criticism by forestalling it. For example, he says that all he wishes to develop is the 'ability to see the point in the actual.' He would dismiss his study 'if it pretends to set itself up as a rival to the general practice of understanding, and distracts the student from his work—which is to interpret, not to discourse on interpretation.' He speaks of the risk he runs in adding 'encumbering machinery, useful perhaps in dissection, but not in forwarding the growth of controlled awareness.' Yet the tenour of the book runs against these very explicit reminders and reveals them to be merely gestures. Though assembled here they seem to cut the ground from under the critic, they do not in fact remove the doubts and dissatisfaction which must strike the teacher concerned for General Education. Dr. Richards will no doubt 'come out into the open' more clearly when he develops his study in future works. Meanwhile, though it would be unfair to point to the recent book by Stuart Chase as a good example of the dangers of his influence, something of the misleading spirit of his approach can be seen in that in many ways excellent work, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*.

H. A. MASON.



## THE METHOD AND THEORY OF THE BAUHAUS

*THE NEW VISION*, by L. Moholy-Nagy (Faber and Faber, 16/-).

In 1933 the National Socialist Government in Germany closed the Bauhaus, to mark its distaste for a method of education which was designed to train its pupils in self-knowledge, direct observation, and the full expression of their creative abilities. The school is now in Chicago, with its director L. Moholy-Nagy. A record of its first year's work there and an account of the Bauhaus ideas and methods are available in English in *The New Vision*. Both are of extreme interest. The Bauhaus students are made aware that design is an expression of the whole man, not a specialized talent which can be developed by learning to apply accepted rules. Their training keeps alive in them the sensitiveness to experience, the spontaneous creative instinct, of the child. It relates these qualities to actual living and working conditions of society, so that the powers and energies released in the individual can be made to serve our common need to use and be surrounded by fully satisfying things. The exercise of the pupil's senses goes along with rigorous workshop training in wood, metal, glass, plastics, and other materials; in the handling of tools and machines; modelling; analytical, life, and geometrical drawing; instruction in mathematics and science (which includes biology). From the Bauhaus, students go out as designers and craftsmen (hand and machine) able to place a superb technical equipment at the service of the community and at the service of their own genuine and unforced creative abilities. In measure as they are able to influence industrial production they can reshape the daily life of society.

There is no question of the value of the Bauhaus experiment. Its insistence on the education of the student along the lines of his biological functions, and its view of society as an organism with biological needs, are corrective of the fatal imbalance of society at present, in which deep biological needs and impulses are everywhere denied. There are few and fewer whole men: there are brain workers and novelists; 'hands,' mouths (useless, useful); uniformed or only registered units. Technical progress, the

potentialities of the machine, are degraded to produce ill-designed and shoddy things for 'the market.' For man, for the satisfaction of his vital instincts, less and less. With the simple malice of the savage, man is arranging to die out by becoming childless.

Its value admitted, the Bauhaus method must be watched for unnatural vices fathered by its heroism (let Mr. Eliot forgive this). Admirable exercises in the surface treatment of materials—the study illustrated on p. 50 of Moholy-Nagy's book shows the line running straight from the child's acute imaginative pleasure in the surface of a worn old table. The 'surface treatment poem' by Marinetti (p. 67) is only tedious and silly—the unintelligent application of a method. Strips of different woods, and the separate letters of words, or words, are not susceptible to the same treatment. Failure to make the distinction shows up a flaw in discrimination and in the training of discrimination. This simple instance puts one on guard against accepting blindly, out of gratitude, every conclusion drawn by Moholy-Nagy. In his account of Picasso he emphasizes this painter's obedience to the 'values of the material' in which he works. This conscious obedience, a necessary element in the release of a new impulse in art, could become itself a bondage; it could become that domination by *things*, that shifting of the centre of value from man to things, which marks the death of our society. Picasso runs this risk of dying of the excess of his virtues; there is a still life here and a relief there which were dead at birth. Moholy-Nagy does, indeed, note that the next step beyond composing a still life of pieces of board nailed on would be to leave them lying on the table. The picture disappears. He does not note that even before the penultimate stage is reached a disintegration has begun which attacks (like a death-watch beetle) that deep instinct for integration of which the Gestalt psychology has provided so much non-mystical evidence. The work of the cubists has (as every object and process has) two aspects, two energies—as a human being dies while he lives. It is a necessary and consciously-directed assault on a dead form. And it is an unconscious submission to those forces in society which have brought it about that things have a greater value than man. I think this paradox has not yet been noticed.

To return to an earlier stage in Picasso's journey—in the pencil drawing of a table (1910) he has abandoned three-dimensional

space representation of the object. The things on the table appear flat, without modelling. Now, it is likely that the child sees things flat, in two dimensions, and later builds them up by touch into three, and by a further effort (or distortion) into four (space-time). Picasso is making the effort to *see* again from the beginning—as an absolutely necessary preparation for a new creation. A departure on what line? (The word distorts the sense: human experience, like the universe, is a continuum; one simply departs). The *Harlequin with Guitar* (1924) suggests the attempt to experience in painting, and to express, certain effects of music. The experience may have had the complexity of music; its expression by the use of paint does not convey its complexity: the subtleties, and the motivating intention, of the musician are not those of the painter and the attempt to express them in paint destroys them. A departure has come to an end in no-man's-land. In other pictures he tries, presenting a view from above, from the side, by cross-section, to achieve that simultaneity of sense experience which music can achieve with the greatest economy and precision: this method of a painter is less economical and infinitely clumsier. In a list he compiles of the means employed by cubism Moholy-Nagy gives the term 'pluralism' to the method by which a contour suggests several objects. Here the proper comparison is with ambiguity in language, in which the more economical means are the more suggestive.

Possibly Picasso has felt the dangers involved in these excursions towards literature and music. In *Guernica* (reproductions of this picture are becoming as common to modern mantelpieces as that painting of Persephone floating out of hell was common to the Leeds landladies of my youth) he has turned back to the method of analysis he was using before the War. In the earlier paintings the interest, the excitement, sprang from the fresh and complex arrangement of the dismembered parts. In *Guernica* there is a smell of synthetic emotion.

Picasso stopped short of leaving his objects lying about unpainted—a natural weakness in a man who knows he can paint. The method of 'light painting' enthusiastically described by Moholy-Nagy is taking another way to get rid of the picture. It achieves a step beyond the elimination of the associations of natural objects by eliminating a special object—the pigment itself.

' Present-day efforts are tending to subordinate even paint (pigment), or at least to sublimate it . . . on polished surfaces, metal, synthetic materials, etc., there is sprayed very thin, iridescent, flowing layers of paint, to which the reflecting layer underneath gives an ethereal fluctuating appearance. The reflections and refractions bring the surroundings into the picture surface.' The picture begins to disappear into its background, and when Malewitch produced a plain white surface with a small white square painted on it he was merely removing every obstacle to the play of light. Another development is the use of pliable and perforated plastic sheets (glass-like) with spot-lights and needle lamps to form a continuously changing 'picture.' Moholy-Nagy suggests that, technically, the picture painted by hand 'is surpassed by the purer "pictorial" light production.' The less heroic critic, recalling that 'Unnatural vices Are fathered by our heroism,' adds yet another to the proofs (lying thick at every level of human activity) that efforts to attain the Absolute negate themselves at such and such a stage, and tumble us into the void. Moholy-Nagy's heroic hegelianism deserved better of the State that exiled him.

The director of a discipline founded in biological processes, he is able to approve of the supersession of the painter's hand by what he himself terms 'mechanical methods.' In this term he is not wholly just to his conception. The mechanical methods are still directed by the painter's impulse, which uses electricity and light projection instead of pigment applied by hand. But—the total divorce of the instinctual-intellectual impulse from the discipline of the hand severs, I am sure, a vital nerve. The process changes its nature: a channel which led back to the biological function is cut off: the activity which continues will become more and more arid, nearer to 'pure' ideation. The Waste Land has been reached again by a different route.

Salvation will then be found (I dare say) in requiring, discovering, a certain contempt for technical resources, and in a less intoxicated attitude to ideas.

Moholy-Nagy's treatment of spatial relations—in painting, sculpture, architecture—is stimulating, and sometimes superficial. He has not noticed that architecture has a closer relation to music than to sculpture: it touches conceptions of time more nearly than those of space. In listening to music we enter a closed (finite)

world created by time according to its own laws. The relation between our senses and the music is a relation in which time produces both causes and effects. The analogy with architecture is clear ; there is a timing between the parts of a well-proportioned building which is the source of our satisfaction in it. The art that works most clearly in purely spatial relations is sculpture, which is thus farther from music than either painting or literature. These last are the expression of space-time relations, and in each of them a proper respect for the material—surfaces, words—should decide the form the artist uses for his purpose. His purpose? To evoke, *with as little loss as possible*, the experience that has taken place in him and can be described as the crystallization, or dissolving into one, of a great many sensations and feelings. The greater artist can realize in a single experience many feelings and sensations, the lesser only a few. A too devout and enthusiastic submission to the nature of materials (from wood to light) drains off energy from the deeper (and largely unconscious) creative function, the *organization* of sensations and feelings into one complex impulse. Moreover, not merely the nature of the material, but the nature of the artist's intention must be respected. The use, as by the surrealist painters, of what one can only call a literary intention, produces a thin-blooded and over-simplified hybrid. At some stage in the unconscious process of organization a conscious motive which would have been at home in the mind of a novelist has entered. The feeling is thus diffused and distorted. What does not run away is then rather self-consciously arranged at a more superficial level. The anecdotal intention of some surrealist paintings is barely disguised by subjecting the anecdote to 'surface treatment.'

This is not to under-praise the value of the Bauhaus emphasis on a respect for material. It is to say that a balance must be struck between observation of material and observation of feeling. The painter Mondrian, 'one of the most valuable painters of our generation,' by what Moholy-Nagy calls 'his puritan approach,' ruthlessly sacrifices complexity of expression. Which has then to be put back into his work (as into the work of some other painters and sculptors) by critics no less distinguished and honest than Mr. Herbert Read. This is as though, finding the child missing from the bath, you reverently put in it his school report. It is not that there is no 'meaning' (the common and foolish charge)

in cubism, constructivism, and the rest. The meaning has shifted to the 'dematerialized and highly intellectualized formula.' Emotional significance has then to be added by the enthusiastic theoretician bringing in his purely literary emotion to redress the balance. Lissitzky, with a greater intellectual rigour and energy than Mondrian, produces very pleasing ideal constructions, which probably correspond with reasonable accuracy to a physical sensation, some apprehension of the nervous or cell structure of the brain. The paraboloid sculpture of Joost Schmidt may originate in a like physical impulse.

The immense pleasure a child feels in shaping and polishing a piece of wood or a stone which has suggested to him some form, or simply fits satisfactorily his hand, is rooted in a primitive bodily impulse that can be elaborated by a Zande into the wood sculptures described by Richard Wyndham, by the T'ang artisans, by a Barlach, a Maillol. The auto-erotic element in certain of Brancusi's sculpture becomes tedious unless one is prepared to enjoy endlessly the hypnotic pleasures of the child. The problem surely is one of fluidity—at what point to arrest the fluidity of the material to give the fullest possible effect of continuity in space (a 'feeling' which is the complement, and the other side, the outside, of the feeling of existence within the time structure of music) before the sculpture, like the painting, disappears. In the 'equipoised sculpture' of the Bauhaus students the border-line has been straddled. In the further stage, which Moholy-Nagy terms 'kinetic equipoise'—the production, by the movement of contours, rods, rings by electricity or other power, of 'virtual volume'—the sculpture has disappeared. Virtual volume can be produced by the revolving lights of a merry-go-round, by an upright wire swayed by a watch spring, by the lights of passing motor-cars. (The reproduction of the virtual volume of these phenomena in photographs satisfied, perhaps—perhaps unconsciously?—a certain weak need for permanence). The deep impulse in kinetic sculpture is, again, the wish to achieve through it some of the (primarily emotional) satisfactions of music. It is, you may say, an adulteration of space with time—which is not an approach to the conception space-time. And once again, the attempt is largely a failure because the material is hopelessly refractory to this use of it; the expression actually achieved is tenuous to a degree.

What a lamentable thing Gaudier-Brezska's death was. That quality of stability and proportion he shares with Rimbaud, unshakeable, as though he had roots meeting at the core of the world, would have allowed him to push fluidity to its extreme limit without the danger of the sculpture disappearing under his intelligence. The curious timidity in the work of Archipenko, Lipchitz, Henry Moore, Arp, Barbara Hepworth, and some other modern sculptors, suggests that they are unconsciously nervous when faced by the basic problem of fluidity.

Moholy-Nagy's own elaborate piece of kinetic sculpture, an apparatus of slotted metal discs and sheets of glass and celluloid, is designed for the automatic projection of changing light effects. It is a charming and ingenious toy—one should not despise toys—and might have consoled the Chinese emperor for the breakdown of his mechanical nightingale: whether it could succour him when dying of *accidie* is another matter. The risk run by kinetic sculptors is the risk of rousing a resistance, a biologically necessary one, to sensory reactions. The frontiers of the Waste Land can be crossed at innumerable points. And one must suspect an enthusiasm so indiscriminate that it gives the term 'creative manipulation of light' to sky-writing and 'projections on to clouds or other gaseous backgrounds through which one can walk, drive, fly,' and so naïve that it states solemnly, 'The illiterate of the future will be, we believe, the person who cannot photograph.'

The sculptor always has been faced by difficulties greater than those of the painter who has to provide himself with canvas and paints. When he must provide himself as well with the means of producing high-powered artificial light he is to be pitied, poor devil. So slavish a dependence on the power-station must make a cripple of him.

The elimination from sculpture of the feeling shared by the Azande and Maillol, and the making it a problem of the organization of relationships of volume, material, position, light, is actually the final stage in an astonishing development. Astonishing, because it turns a mental process inside out and leads back into architecture. These problems are basically problems of timing. Here, in architecture, and in stage settings, the study of them along Bauhaus lines could be of the greatest value. It should be pursued.

Modern movements in art—in painting, sculpture, literature—have been worse served by their supporters than by their opponents. A vital impulse—which this was and is—survives misrepresentation and even neglect. It can be injured by indiscriminate acceptance. Moholy-Nagy's educational work has immense interest and value. The bases of his practice are sound—art is a function of the whole self or it is, however clever (amusing, brilliant, serious), a trick. Design is the active expression of the fully developed emotional and intellectual powers of the individual. An intensive study of materials sharpens the sense of touch (with all that that brings with it), and teaches the eye to serve fully the nerve centres of the brain. Valuable experiments are made. At a certain stage, the intellect, that spider, gets out of control and begins to weave a tissue which becomes more and more a 'dematerialized and highly intellectualized formula': equilibrium is overthrown, and what began as a biological function ends (and withers) in—to borrow from Mr. Eliot again—'merely vans to beat the air, The air which is now thoroughly small and dry, Smaller and dryer than the will.'

A younger growth of painters and sculptors is already profiting as much by the excesses as by the virtues of the experimenters. It is surely safe, and it is certainly time, to talk dispassionately.

STORM JAMESON.

## MR. C. S. LEWIS AND THE STATUS QUO

*REHABILITATIONS AND OTHER ESSAYS, by C. S. Lewis*  
(Oxford University Press, 7/6).

The rehabilitations in this volume consist of essays on Shelley and Morris and a dry-as-dust account of the rules for writing in alliterative metre ; none of them is at all impressive, and in a short review it seems more important to concentrate on those essays in which Mr. Lewis defines his position as a lecturer and tutor in English literature. I wish to do this not merely because I disagree with Mr. Lewis's conclusions on these matters but because what seems to me a spurious quality in his thinking can here be defined most sharply. This quality is not generally recognized, and Mr. Lewis has already achieved a reputation as a don who can stand up to non-academic critics with more than their own weapons, as



a scholar who is also a critic of literature, a controversialist with a style.

Reviewing *Seventeenth-Century Studies* in these pages (June, 1938) I commented on the controversial methods employed by Mr. Lewis in his essay on Donne. Some of the same tricks appear in the present book. There is, for example, the trick of disparaging unnamed opponents who remain conveniently vague—'our modern impostors,' 'the new Puritanism,' 'some of Mr. Eliot's weaker disciples'; and there is at times the same irritating tone of superiority. But it is in other ways that Mr. Lewis makes rational discussion of his central themes so difficult. In 'The Idea of an "English School,"' for example, discussion is confined from the start to a field from which all awkward fundamental questions are arbitrarily excluded, and the reader may not at first observe that the apparently careful and impartial logic is functioning solely in relation to questions which are at most of secondary interest. Blandly assuming that the very first question to be asked is whether or not the university English curriculum should include Anglo-Saxon and Middle English, Mr. Lewis proceeds to discuss this question in terms of 'origins' and 'influences,' and the essay soon resolves itself into a debate concerning the respective claims of the Classics and of early English writings to be considered as the source of our later literature. Early English wins: 'If, then, we are concerned with origins, Anglo-Saxon must keep its place in any English syllabus.' Safely blinkered in the opening pages the docile reader may find the conclusion fairly reached.

If, however, the reader refuses to be blinkered; if he believes that 'the idea of an English School' must bear some relation to problems of individual insight and development, and that an essay with so lofty a title should have something to say concerning the human ends in view, then he will find himself discussing very different questions from those that Mr. Lewis propounds, and he will require something more specific than the abstractions 'unity and continuity' (p. 74) to convince him of the necessity of Anglo-Saxon.

The paper that follows, on 'Our English Syllabus' (sc. at Oxford), is a defence of 'learning' as distinguished from vocational training on the one hand and 'education'—the special function

of the schools—on the other. 'The university student is essentially a different person from the school pupil. He is not a candidate for humanity, he is, in theory, already human.' Dons and undergraduates, then, are partners in the pursuit of 'learning for its own sake,' and although learning may have some educational value, this is only a by-product, just as health is a by-product of games. 'Though you may have come here only to be educated,' the undergraduate is told, 'you will never receive that precise educational gift which a university has to give you unless you can at least *pretend*, so long as you are with us, that you are concerned not with education but with knowledge for its own sake. And we, on our part, can do very little for you if we aim directly at your education . . . We are not going to try to improve you ; we have fulfilled our whole function if we help you to *see* some given tract of reality.' The alternative to turning the undergraduate loose on a 'given tract of reality' is, it seems, to offer him a composite syllabus—'a little philosophy, a little politics, a little economics, a little science, a little literature' ; and the objection to 'the composite school' is that 'those little bits of various subjects are not found lying together in those quantities and in that order which the syllabus shows. They have been put together in that way artificially by a committee of professors.' After an excursion to prove that 'there is an intrinsic absurdity in making current literature a subject of academic study,' and that 'the student who wants a tutor's assistance in reading the works of his own contemporaries might as well ask for a nurse's assistance in blowing his own nose,' the paper reaches a fine manly conclusion: 'In the great rough country-side which we throw open to you, you can choose your own path. Here's your gun, your spade, your fishing-tackle ; go and get yourself a dinner.'

This essay, it is true, offers something more substantial for discussion than its predecessor. But I think that Mr. Lewis, who here states his case in such a way that disagreement seems at once to involve absurdities, wants to browbeat rather than to discuss. Some of the quotations I have given illustrate his disarming use of the false antithesis. If your experience leads you to believe that there is no great gulf between the sixth-form boy and the first-year undergraduate, then you are safely labelled as a meddling pedagogue bent on 'improving' your pupils. (This isn't

really a knock-out, since Mr. Lewis's conception of 'education'—a process in which the master is an 'agent' or 'operator' and the pupil a 'patient'—is so obviously silly). If you think that there is some place in a university English course for the discussion of modern literature (heaven forbid it should be 'a subject of academic study'!) you are no better than a nose-blowing nurse. Worst of all, if you disagree with Mr. Lewis's main contentions you are one of the lily-livered, afraid to look on 'reality in the raw' (p. 89).

It is in such ways that Mr. Lewis buttresses his argument in favour of specialization. To offer criticism of the kind of specialization exemplified in the Oxford English School is, he implies, to commit oneself to those 'little bits of various subjects,' to arbitrary selection, to 'propaganda.' It seems to me that cutting off a hundred or two hundred years from this end of English literature and ignoring the history of the English people, social, economic and intellectual (pp. 91-92), is a pretty arbitrary selection to start with. But even more serious is Mr. Lewis's complete inability to envisage any point of view other than his own except in the most ludicrous forms. I do not know what he would say to those who claim that some insight into 'reality' can be gained from the study of a particular culture as a whole—of literature and its social and extra-literary relations—even if, in an English course, that study must *begin* from English literature. Nor do I know what he would say to those who, unashamedly seeking to educate their pupils as well as themselves, direct their efforts to the development of genuinely individual taste and critical intelligence, to the sharpening of tools that can be used outside any limits that the teacher may impose. But certainly those who are accustomed to thinking in such terms are not likely to find 'learning for its own sake' a very substantial positive. What 'learning for its own sake' is likely to mean in practice is simply useless learning—the study of origins, forms and influences.

In the essay on 'High and Low Brows' there is a similar blurring of the issues. The possibility of distinguishing between literature ('Good Books') and what can be roughly classified as entertainment literature ('Books')—a distinction which Mr. Lewis denies—raises some interesting questions; but the reader who hopes for clarification will be disappointed. There is no space to follow

the hops, skips and jumps of the argument, and I can only register the suspicion that Mr. Lewis is less interested in his topic than in finding excuses for an attitude. 'Beware how you scorn the best sellers of to-day; they may be classics for the intelligentsia of the Twenty-Third Century. If our age is known to posterity not as that of Eliot and Auden but as that of Buchan and Wodehouse (and stranger things have come to pass), Buchan and Wodehouse will then be B's (*i.e.*, Good Books) and little boys will get good marks for reading them.' That is very comforting; and I think it explains some part of Mr. Lewis's reputation. With his learning and ingenuity he brings much needed support to those who wish to be confirmed in certain complacent attitudes, who combine a distaste for 'highbrow' literature with an aversion from radical enquiries concerning the academic *status quo*.

L. C. KNIGHTS.

## ARNOLD'S THOUGHT

MATTHEW ARNOLD, by Lionel Trilling (*George Allen and Unwin, 15/-*).

This is a disappointing book—disappointing because its intention is clearly so admirable. There is nothing Stracheyan about Mr. Trilling's approach to his subject; he admires Arnold, has studied him closely and scrupulously, and sets to work with disinterested ardour and industry to bring out and define the nature of Arnold's peculiar distinction. This is a very difficult undertaking, as Mr. Trilling's book (and I say this partly as a compliment) makes us very much aware. He also makes us aware that he knows that an adequate approach must be free from the limitations we associate with academic writing. But his very concern (a common one in the academic world nowadays) to show an unacademic openness to the best that is thought and known in our time exposes certain disabling limitations very plainly to our view: he has extremely generous notions as to the range of authorities and witnesses worth citing in support of his argument, and this generosity is of the kind that goes with a lack of any notable vigour of first-hand thinking. It will perhaps be enough to say here that he finds Miss Sitwell's opinions worth respectful consideration, and that he seems not to doubt our recognition of Mr. Aldous Huxley as an intellect of a high order.

It seems to me an associated deficiency that enables Mr. Trilling to accept Arnold as a great poet. At any rate, I think that the evaluation of Arnold as a thinker is a task to which no intelligence that cannot manifest itself in critical perception where poetry is concerned is likely to be adequate. Mr. Trilling's theme in the earlier part of his book is Arnold's attempt to save his creative gift from

this iron time

Of doubts, disputes, distractions, fears

to which it ultimately succumbed—to protect it behind a front of dandyism that should prevent his being drawn into the inhibiting preoccupations represented by the earnest Clough :

‘ Misunderstood, hiding behind a mask of irresponsibility, Arnold is free to cultivate that internal, meditative, slowly-precipitating part of himself which is to produce poetry. He is free from the questioning moralism and the restless intellectual drive of Rugby and Oxford . . . behind the high wall of his mockery.’

At the same time we are to see Arnold the poet as the T. S. Eliot of his age, crystallizing its finer consciousness—registering its peculiar strains, sensitivenesses and apprehensions—in a poetry that may be regarded as analogous in significance to Mr. Eliot's. Mr. Trilling doesn't, indeed, make the comparison ; in fact, he cites with approval Mr. Eliot's remark that Arnold's poetry is academic. But it is characteristic of Mr. Trilling's book that it should nevertheless convey the major valuation of Arnold as poet suggested above. Actually, of course, the mention of Mr. Eliot introduces a criterion that disposes of the claim for Arnold, whom the ‘ academic ’ fairly places (though I can't agree with Mr. Eliot that the same weaknesses which ‘ make Arnold an academic poet make him an academic critic ’).

Arnold's poetry is academic in that, for all its individual quality and the uncommon distinction of taste it presents, its virtues are of the same kind that appeal to the awarders of university prizes ; it has nothing essentially more vital to offer—nothing disturbing to the habits of those who know what poetry is. Arnold's use of words is not (if the discrimination may be made in this way) poetic but poetical ; it doesn't show us a strongly individual sensibility commanding words from below and compelling them into organizations

of fresh and intense vitality. If his effects appear to be poetic it is almost wholly because of the work done by other poets, and not because of any profound response in Arnold to his own time. His habit and approach are essentially non-poetic. His themes are thought, felt and written—with lucidity—about ; theme and poetry remain separate—it would be quite appropriate, in appraising Arnold, to talk of ‘ subject ’ and ‘ treatment.’ The theme could be fairly discussed in paraphrase, for it would lose no substance or significance ; the poetry is a matter of conventionally poetical phrasing (‘still clutching the inviolable shade ’), adjectives, mention of things of accepted poetical value (mountains, glens, moonlight), and the languidly wistful sentiment that seems to pervade the poem with uniform density or thinness. The originality of the technically original verse for which Arnold is noted is the originality of the same poet.

For full justice this account would, of course, need qualifying, but it is a fair enough reply to an estimate of Arnold as a poet of genius. The point about his poetry may be made by saying that no one could have divined from it the energy, originality and distinction of mind manifested in his prose.

But that having been said we are at once faced with the question, what kind of distinction can, then, be claimed for Arnold as a thinker? If Mr. Trilling helps us towards an answer it is by implicitly making the question so unavoidable. The Arnold we are shown is not only incapable of sustained cogency or coherence of thought; even when tackled locally, within limits that might be supposed to favour the display of his strength, he appears commonly to be unsusceptible of satisfactory paraphrase. Even though we have to judge that Mr. Trilling’s deficiencies have plainly some part in this appearance, the book does nevertheless lead us to glance towards the conclusion that Arnold was not a thinker at all.

It is, however, impossible to rest in such a conclusion. We may be left feeling that some other word than ‘ thinker ’ would fit Arnold more comfortably, but no concession can be allowed that denies Arnold remarkable distinction of intelligence. His dealings with religion have brought on him a severity of comment that few would undertake to defend him against, and his political thought, in its inconsistencies and its lack of outline and development, would seem to lay itself open to criticism hardly less destructive. Yet, when this

is admitted, Arnold is not disposed of. By any criteria he has serious faults and weaknesses ; yet there is more than one kind of valuable thinking, and if his virtues are to be properly recognized it is important not to apply wrong criteria. It seems, then, to me that as a thinker about the problems of culture and society he exhibits qualities of much the same order as make him a notable literary critic.

If he was not a systematic thinker like Mill, nor was he a mere vaticinatory sage like Carlyle. He stood essentially for intelligence, and if one can imagine the virtues attended by less in the way of disadvantages than they actually were, nevertheless his peculiar application of intelligence had, it should be impossible to doubt, its peculiar virtues. And when one compares him with the other notabilities of the age that distinguished themselves in relation to the same problems, it does not become less plain that there may be an important function for an intelligence that, in its sensitive concern for the concrete, its perception of complexities, and its delicate responsiveness to actualities, is indifferent to theoretic rigour or completeness and does not mind incurring the charge of incapacity for strict thinking.

The problems that preoccupied him may be brought, as Mr. Trilling says, under the general head of 'disintegration.' In the confident hey-day of Progress Arnold insisted that he saw around him social and cultural decay and the threat of worse to come. He was not, of course, alone in this ; but he found no congenial company among the representative critics of the age. Newman's response to the nineteenth century was for Arnold out of the question, and, on the other hand, he had a strong distaste for Carlyle. For though he he didn't share (shall we say) John Bright's faith in democracy, he had no bent for anti-democratic fulminations and no tendency to look for salvation to the advent of a Führer. And moreover to assert and establish the authority of reason was very much Arnold's concern.

At this point it is in place to quote an interesting passage in which Mr. Trilling compares him with Mill :

' for both men the idea of the development of the full personality was precious and both looked to Periclean Athens as the ideal condition for it ; both had read Tocqueville and caught his

fear that personal development would be prevented by democracy's dull sameness ; and finally, both shared a profound reliance upon reason. Here, however, Arnold and Mill part, for Mill so firmly believed in reason that he thought that nothing, apart from its exercise and free utterance, might be done to establish it. Arnold, on the other hand, believed so firmly in reason that he was certain that it justified the use of its antithesis, force, without which it was powerless.'

Arnold, that is, had a much more positive notion of society and the State than Mill.

' Mill's social theory is essentially an atomic one . . . In Arnold's more organic conception of society . . . '

—It will be noticed that when Mr. Trilling comes to Arnold he doesn't repeat the word ' theory,' and it would, in fact, be misleading. For Arnold's writings will hardly be found to yield any satisfactory theoretical statement of his views. But, as has already been suggested, to admit that Arnold was not a systematic thinker is not to say that his writings don't represent an essential function of intelligence.

His was the age in which the *Times*, surveying, as Mr. Trilling reports it, the East End during a slump, could say :

' There is no one to blame for this, it is the result of Nature's simplest laws.'

To Arnold it was obvious that the notions of the nature of society and the views of the function of the State implied in this proposition were inadequate, and with untiring suppleness of attack and lifelong persistence he contended for his own very different convictions. Had his advocacy depended for its persuasiveness on convincing analysis, rigour of definition and the logical cogency of his argument he might as well have held his peace. When he said that the State should represent ' our higher selves ' he was not expounding or implying a metaphysical theory of the State, and the force of the phrase—if we grant it any force—depends not upon a logical context, but upon the kind of virtue that is exemplified here :

' Each section of the public has its own literary organ, and the mass of the public is without any suspicion that the value



of these organs is relative to their being nearer a certain ideal centre of correct information, taste, and intelligence, or farther away from it. I have said that within certain limits, which any one who is likely to read this will have no difficulty in drawing for himself, my old adversary, the *Saturday Review*, may, on matters of literature and taste, be fairly enough regarded, relatively to the mass of newspapers which treat these matters, as a kind of organ of reason. But I remember once conversing with a company of Nonconformist admirers of some lecturer who had let off a great firework, which the *Saturday Review* said was all noise and false lights, and feeling my way as tenderly as I could about the effect of this unfavourable judgment upon those with whom I was conversing. "Oh," said one who was their spokesman, with the most tranquil air of conviction, "it is true that the *Saturday Review* abuses the lecture, but the *British Banner* . . . says that the *Saturday Review* is quite wrong." The speaker had evidently no notion that there was a scale of value for judgments on these topics, and that the judgments of the *Saturday Review* ranked high on this scale, and those of the *British Banner* low.'

The truth asserted by this passage is one that it would hardly have been profitable to try and demonstrate. Arnold's persuasiveness is a matter of reminding his public of what they know already ; his cogency is seen in the way in which he makes recognition, in the bearings and consequences immediately relevant to his purpose, unavoidable. His strength was that, though the problems to which he was addressing himself may be summed up under 'disintegration,' the process of disintegration hadn't gone so far that he couldn't invoke with effect the notion of an 'ideal centre of correct information, taste and intelligence,' and refer to a 'scale of value for judgments' that made the appeal to the *British Banner* obviously provincial and absurd. He had in this respect a decided advantage over anyone who should undertake equivalent work to-day.

He describes his ruling preoccupation here :

'The master-thought by which my politics are governed is . . . this—the thought of the bad civilization of the English middle-class.'

His advantage was that his classification of the country into Barbarians, Philistines and Populace was less adequate than he suggested: there was a large and influential public capable of appreciating it. To induce a better civilization upon the English middle-class appeared a not altogether unhopeful undertaking because, in spite of the 'disintegrating' progress—in spite of industrialism, *laissez-faire* and the march of science—the sense of what a civilization should be was as yet very far from extinguished. Arnold's essential effort was to focus and strengthen it, develop it into a lively consciousness and bring it to an adequate realization of the problem (and it was an effort as much towards realization within himself as directed outwards). Though we can imagine a better Arnold, one who should have had his virtues and less disability, the systematic thinker's preoccupation with consistency and precision could in any case hardly have gone with those virtues—the peculiar sensitive mobility of intelligence, the constantly fresh concern for a delicate apprehension of actualities, the lack of interest in merely theoretical conclusions and results.

It is in his writings about religion that his weaknesses and limitations appear at their most injurious. Nevertheless, if it must be confessed that these writings look impotently 'period' now, still that is not all there is to say. On the one hand, it is impossible to wish that Arnold had been able to ignore the religious problem. On the other hand, a theologically respectable Arnold could hardly have been that representative fine consciousness of his time it was his peculiar function to be. And when we are most inclined to feel the weakness of his writings about religion as discreditable and disqualifying, it is appropriate to recall the tribute that Hopkins paid him in rebuking Bridges:

'I have more reason than you for disagreeing with him and thinking him very wrong, but nevertheless, I am sure he is a rare genius and a great critic.'

Arnold's greatness (to accept Hopkins's valuation) was bound up with his readiness to expose his inadequacies, and to venture where he might not be qualified. He represents the unspecialized intelligence asserting its rights and duties in a modern industrial civilization and devoting itself with courage to the problem of restoring the unity of culture. He saw that irreversible changes had

occurred, and thought that certain consequences had to be recognized, and was not, in any case, opposed to change as such ; but his point of view was that of one who was intent on conserving a heritage that he felt to be in great danger of being lost. To the Liberals, on whom for the most part he turned his irony, he must sometimes have seemed a decided reactionary ; but he can never have seemed a safe man to the Tories. For an interesting example of that in him which exasperated his contemporaries as inconsistency the reader may be referred to Mr. Trilling's account of how, having offended the orthodox by his contention that the Church must come to terms with modern critical thought, Arnold opposed Bishop Colenso. And inconsistency it must be allowed to be ; though even in this instance there is a creditable aspect. For a wholly creditable illustration of his suppleness of mind, or whatever other term most favourably suggests the opposite of rigidity, there is the account of the American tour. He found much more to admire in America than one could have anticipated. In particular, he liked the absence of the English class-distinctions.

No one would suggest that Arnold solved any problems, and it cannot even be claimed for him that his thought left any matter advanced a stage, to be taken up by someone else. And if he could examine how it stands with his causes to-day, he would have to report that, with the big exception of education, things have for the most part got desperately worse—so that the exception looks like an irony. Should anyone conclude from that to Arnold's futility, there is, perhaps, no better reply than that, if we could have had an Arnold to-day, it would have been a matter for gratitude. Having no Arnold, what we enviously see him as standing for is the vigorous and influential existence of a cultivated and responsible public, repository of a liberal spirit and a humane tradition. Our thanks are due to Mr. Trilling for helping us to realize more fully this aspect of Arnold.

F. R. LEAVIS.

## THE FUNCTION OF SCIENCE

*THE SOCIAL FUNCTION OF SCIENCE*, by J. D. Bernal  
(Routledge, 12/6).

'Can we so concern ourselves with ultimate ends that they will determine how we shall use our means, or are we to continue giving all our attention to means so that they will shape our ends?' (Biaggini—*Education and Society*).

The term 'frustration' has been used, amongst others, to indicate an aspect and even the main problem of the contemporary 'crisis' (the word must be used, even though the reaction to it is increasingly numb). There is a sense in which the problem is one of frustration, but if it is used also to imply the barring of some well-conceived end, then such use may well be unfortunate. There are reasons for thinking that not only in general problems, but also in science—where it has had a more particular application—the trouble is more one of frustration from ends only vaguely, if at all, in view. Frustration in these circumstances may hardly be the suitable word, yet, when ends are sacrificed, or ignored, to the ritual of means, it is the less surprising that a state approximating to one of frustration should prevail.

The significance of science to-day makes it necessary to give full consideration to any sign of disease and when, as has been suggested, there is little doubt that this disease is also a reflection of more general troubles then some investigation seems to be the more necessary. Whilst science was once considered to be a universal blessing providing the means of permanent progress, there are now more than a few suggestions that many of the world's difficulties are in fact the result of 'progress' and that science is proving to be not even a mixed blessing. The bulk of the criticism has been confined to the post-war period, and particularly to the last ten or twelve years. If at first it was mainly due to the criticism of a few laymen—and so largely ignored by scientists and passively accepted by the lay public—more recently there has been a rapidly increasing uneasiness among the scientists themselves. Typical of the former was the suggestion of a suppression of research and its application (*e.g.*, the British Association Sermon, in 1927). Features of the confusion and changing attitudes of the scientists

during the last few years are seen in an increasing number of books, essays and addresses, whilst more official attitudes appear in the concern of the British Association with the social relations of science and in the changing policy of the conservative columns of *Nature*.

The publication this year of Professor Bernal's *The Social Function of Science* provides a convenient opportunity at once for reviewing some of the problems and scientists' attitudes towards them, of examining some of the suggested solutions, and for attempting some assessment of this 'crisis' and its relations to other sides of life. At the same time the public of this quarterly may provide by its critically developed attitudes an opportunity for stating some points which might lead elsewhere to potential ambiguity.

Since in some ways this review may not be typical, it seems necessary before going further, to acknowledge the importance of the work which Professor Bernal has done. His survey of the difficulties and inconsistencies in research seems to be the best and most detailed available, whilst his propounding of a working scheme for solution of these problems shows an ability to comprehend at once the various fields of science (in spite of his disclaimer), and so many of their relations with life and society, which is encouraging in the face of the spreading specialization. If qualifications regarding the adequacy of this approach should be made later—for as well as solutions it provides apparent symptoms of disease—this is not to deny its value as far as it goes and, if it is necessary to make the point, one can but say that it is important that it should be read widely, not only by research workers, but also by the general reader. For the present purpose it provides some necessary evidence and also those additional points which make further discussion possible and even essential, and any criticism will in fact be a measure of its importance.

With rare exceptions it was not until the last war that there was any serious attempt to provide co-ordination of science. Then the immediate needs demanded both some degree of control and at least some proportion of 'state' research but, along with these, came also a chaos of authority and objective. From such foundations arose the post-war scientific and technical advances and these persisted until the social and economic 'crises' of recent

years. 'With what appears to be a strange coincidence, the disturbing events of the Great War, the Russian revolution, the economic crisis, the rise of Fascism, and the preparation for newer and more terrible wars have been paralleled inside the field of science by the greatest changes in theory and in general outlook that it has undergone in the past three centuries.' The sudden impact of these various issues, in all of which they were more or less concerned, led a number of scientists to reconsider the bases of their beliefs and of their work. It will be clear that the result of such thoughts could hardly be satisfying. Along with the achievements of science, and to those who had any faith in it, its undoubted potentialities, there still exist and are likely to exist under present conditions 'War, financial chaos, voluntary destruction of goods which millions need, general under-nourishment, and the fear of still other wars more terrible than any before in history.' In distinction from the previous fiction of a 'pure' science, it became necessary to realize how integrally science had become a part of society—was in fact an important cause of change in society, developing in turn, however, apparently by accident, in response to the claims of society. Scientific research and teaching were small but critically important sections of industrial production. Science had become an institution—comparable with the Church—and one concerned with, and at present dependent upon, the making of profit. As such it was inevitable that it should be subject to the fluctuations of the financial system and to-day its chief means of expansion lie, apparently, along the channels of war research.

The main lines are clear. In association Professor Bernal sees the vicious circle of scientific instruction in school and university and the connected chaos of authority and objective in the leading academic and state institutions. These affect all too clearly the financing of research and the quality of the personnel. The problems are well known in one aspect or another—the effects of private endowment—lack of integration—specialization—bureaucracy—lack of freedom in research—and secrecy: various others will spring to mind and have their application to research both in the universities and in industry.

It is difficult to quarrel with this outline of the condition of science and the opposing tendencies which now strangle it. There is little doubt that it is the best presentation available, even though

different people may wish to underline this or to qualify the weight attached to that feature. Even more important, however, are the solutions proposed, and here again, one cannot but admire the thoroughness with which so many of them have been worked out. The scientist in particular should find the concept of the organic laboratory, capable of growth, reproduction and *natural death*, well worthy of consideration, whilst the plans for solving the un-coordinated increase of publications offers great hope if only they could be adopted in time. Equally interesting to the scientist, but of even more obviously general concern, are the proposals regarding the re-organization of our past knowledge and future research, the financing of science, its correlation with industry, etc.: they contain the basis of a real solution to these immediate problems, in so far as they can be considered as isolated one from another. Yet characteristic of Professor Bernal's approach is a realization that matters cannot be solved piecemeal since they all are essentially connected with what are now termed social problems. He submits that under the present system it is not possible for science to function adequately since there are factors in the society which tend to nullify the efforts of scientists and to deny ultimately even their existence. The only workable solution must involve a change in society itself, and it is in fact part of his thesis that just as science is an integral process of society—it is a process of widening knowledge—and is necessarily conditioned by society, in return it also is a conditioning factor and during its own development is the cause of social change. He is clearly affected here by the logic of dialectical materialism which in this respect, at least, provides a point of view to which scientists, and biologists in particular, should not easily take objection. The whole course of science, in particular the biological sciences, for the last seventy years has tended to confirm the confidence with which Marx and Engels maintained their ideas of the processes of action and interaction, in place of the merely partial adequacy of the earlier concept of 'cause and effect.' Yet in view of this, and of his obvious leaning to the Marxian attitude, it seems the more remarkable that Professor Bernal hardly allows sufficient weight to the inter-relationships inherent in some other aspects.

He makes it clear that education (or its lack) in the young

scientist is at the root of many of his problems, and some space is given to questions of science training in schools, the examination bugbear, the inadequacy of the university training, specialization and its dangers, and above all the vicious circle composed of teacher, scholar, student, lecturer, graduate, research and teaching. If some of this is rather on the lines of expected and almost orthodox criticism of contemporary methods, yet many essential points are gathered together. In solution we are offered a more thorough yet broader conception of science teaching in the schools. The place of science in social life is to be emphasized, the examination system to be revised to emphasize intelligence rather than memory, the value of experiment and practice is underlined, and the dangers of specialization are to be minimized. Along lines such as these it is hoped that not only will science develop more fully, but that in association there will come an appreciation of its needs and an understanding of its place in the social scheme, *i.e.*, of the needs it can satisfy.

There is reason to see here at once some of the weakness of Professor Bernal's arguments as well as part of their strength. Even more significant weakness is shown when dealing with the ends to which science, and the efforts to reorganize it, should be aimed—in other words, the social scheme in which it would have its place. These points seem the more worthy of criticism since the former usually finds a place in the proposed solutions of both scientists and others, whilst the latter (not so usually dealt with) is so integrally related to the other aspects of life and involves so clearly the ultimate test of the whole that it is essential that the two be discussed in association, and it is important to look more closely at the ends visualized. In doing so it will be well to remember that just as economic conditions (in the widest sense) helped to determine man, so he helped to determine them: also that whilst the pressure of such conditions is undeniable, yet 'bread and clothes' are not enough, and their importance is measured by the ends in view.

Ends are discussed from time to time, and more particularly towards the end of the book. It is perhaps both characteristic and significant that they should be mixed with more immediate matters. Having reviewed the possible modifications of research largely from the point of view of science, Bernal goes on to consider science in the service of man. Needs are grouped in the following



order: (1) food, shelter, health, *enjoyment* and the organization for providing them; (2) the recognition of and the satisfaction of new needs arising in the course of the growth of society and (3) 'Finally society takes cognizance of itself and at the same time expresses itself in what may be called its culture: in manners, art, and in the general attitude towards life. Here again not only operative science, but also the world picture which science presents, are essential factors.' It is not easy to find precise definition of the ends in view and, whilst one can realize and even sympathize with the difficulties, the small space and discussion given to them seem to be significant. The dangers of quoting out of the context are, I hope, realized, yet quotation seems necessary, both for precision and for fairness. On p. 379 'There are still large tasks for mankind to undertake—the ultimate conquest of space, of disease, and death, most of all their ways of living together.' In the following discussion, however, the importance of the last seems to be lost in the fascinating possibilities of the first. In writing of Science and Culture (dealt with in one page) we find, 'The present situation, where a highly developed science stands almost isolated from a traditional literary culture, is altogether anomalous and cannot last.' 'The dryness and austerity of science . . . is something which must be removed before science can fully take its place as a common framework of life and thought.' 'At the same time, history, tradition, literary form, and visual presentation will come more and more to belong to science.' The following quotation also, although not quite in the same context, seems relevant: 'we must, in the interests not only of humanity *but of science itself*, strive to secure such a system.' (my italics). Although the object, that of changing economic and political systems, may be received with sympathy, the stress here is not a happy one.

These remarks suggest, perhaps, some confusion of thought, and it seems essentially to be one of ends and means. It is likely that in Professor Bernal's mind there was a better realization of 'ends' than is explicitly stated here, that he was not quite so fully occupied with material means for existence and 'enjoyment' as his space distribution would suggest. Yet since the attitude and the emphasis is a reflection of those of several other writers, it becomes more important to make some qualifications regarding it. In reply Professor Bernal might say that he was not concerned

with subjects outside science, that culture and the ends of life were incidental to his theme, yet in view of the far reaching nature of his survey and the nature of the method—the implicit acknowledgment of the integration within and between phenomena and knowledge—this must remain unlikely. It seems more likely that some of the problems have not been sufficiently realized, and some sections dealing with education appear to bear this out. In so far as we can isolate science from the rest of the education, so many of the suggested improvements are in themselves admirable. Yet is it entirely an unfortunate accident that the impression is given that a change in the attitude to science is, if not the only, then by far the most important change required? The question seems to be, not so much 'Where is science going?', but 'Is science an end in itself?'

Since it is necessary to go further than this, it may be useful to ask another question. It is not likely that Professor Bernal expected his book to be read only by scientists, yet if its value is to be assessed—as it must if it is to succeed in its purpose—it is necessary to inquire on what standards he would expect the educated reader to rely, what form of education could develop them and how far such an education is readily available? Further, can such standards be ignored by the scientist and, if not, how did—or could—he acquire them? Professor Bernal has himself drawn attention to the layman's difficulty in judging between the 'High Priests' of science, and his suggestions for the general improvement of science training in education are intended, among other things, to resolve this. Yet we must still ask whether this is enough. The necessity of a scientific attitude is sufficiently obvious to prevent any suggestion that a change in training is not required. But there is still the need for an education providing criteria not merely for judging the qualities of research as such, but also 'from the realm of general intelligence, for determining which specialists can be trusted, and how far' (*Scrutiny*, I, IV, p. 320). It may be suggested that 'good' science and scientists will at once have the right aims and provide the education which would demand them, but unless by science is understood the 'summa' of all knowledge and understanding—and this would appear to be begging all questions, or evading them—there still remains the most important object of education, training for living,

an object to which science is ultimately subservient, and one which there is good reason to know is seldom sufficiently stressed. The point is a difficult one to make, although it is one which has been implicit in the general attitudes of this quarterly. Reference may also be made to *Education and Society* (Biaggini, particularly the last chapter). A particularly relevant comment has been made by Otis (*The New Frontier*, I, II, p. 20) in reference to Gasset on the Function of the University: 'The man of "culture" is the man who . . . is responsible for "civilization," and whose function is to govern or to assure the existence of government—that is the direction of society in terms of the "best" ideas of the time. The man of Science is the contributor of "new" ideas. He is not a professor, he is an investigator. He is not a teacher of what he has learned, but rather a discoverer of what he has never learned.' By this it must not be thought that society should be composed of those who merely discover the 'new,' and those who do not—we all find some signs of the new and all should, as members, be responsible for the direction of society. The danger lies rather in the risk that the new should be sought for its own sake. If it is suggested that there are such tendencies in this survey (and that they have also been shown by many other writers with similar objects in view), this is not meant to be a criticism of science itself, but rather of the motives with which it is applied. Admittedly there are so many sides of life providing obvious problems for solution that it is the easier, when faced with the immediate, to forget—or to avoid—consideration of the reasons for solving them. The possibility, however, that this can occur is itself the most serious sign of social disease, and, in view of its intimate relationship with all other sides of life, it seems to be one demanding much greater attention than it is usually given by both scientists and others.

Is it necessary to add—perhaps it is—that in order to maintain standards it is necessary to live? To modify Bernal's statement, 'we must, in the interests not only of humanity, but of culture itself, strive to secure such a system' that will permit the maintenance *and development* of living values. This can only be done with the aid of all the forces which can be arranged on the side of the real life, and of these science is perhaps one of the strongest. If 'isolation is the most obvious characteristic of the modern

sensibility,' such a state is not, unfortunately, less representative of the scientist than of the artist. The critical minds of both fields are faced ultimately with the same difficulties, composing, as they do, 'the very small group of those who actually make "original" contributions' to knowledge and understanding (B. Otis). The only reasonable hope of attaining ends either immediately desirable to us (or in the future to 'the men of the new society') must lie in the provision of an education which shall provide a basis for communication between them and—is it not even more important?—shall provide an 'educated' public (the rest of the world) which shall need and shall be able to understand the ideas of their age and without which those ideas, scientific or artistic, are useless.

C. E. LUCAS.

## MR. ELIOT'S NEW PLAY

*THE FAMILY REUNION*, by T. S. Eliot (*Faber and Faber*, 7/6).

Mr. Eliot has disappointed us so many times during the last ten years, has abandoned so consistently the standards that he himself taught us to respect, that it is becoming increasingly difficult to approach a new book by him with the impartiality that is essential to literary criticism. No scrupulous critic can altogether avoid the feeling that he may have exaggerated the effect on Mr. Eliot's work of changes of allegiance that he himself, for one reason or another, finds unsympathetic. When all allowances have been made, however, it can only be said that, with the solitary exception of *The Rock*, *The Family Reunion* is the worst poem of any pretensions that Mr. Eliot has yet written.

The theme is the familiar one of the disintegration of the middle classes. The occasion of the family reunion is the Dowager Lady Monchensey's birthday. It is also the occasion of the return of Harry, her son and heir, to the family seat after eight years' absence. A year before the events dealt with in the play Harry's (undesirable) wife had been lost from a trans-Atlantic liner. He believes (whether rightly or wrongly we are not told) that he pushed her overboard, and the play is a psychological study of

remorse complicated by the motifs of 'sin' and 'expiation' and the introduction of the Eumenides borrowed from classical tragedy. A friendly reviewer has compared the play to a story by Henry James. I should feel inclined to choose a less exalted name. In spite of the difference of setting, it is a *cas de conscience* of the kind made familiar by the novels of M. François Mauriac. It lacks the extraordinary competence of that writer and though I did not see the production at the Westminster Theatre, I cannot believe that it possessed anything like the entertainment value of Copeau's admirable production of the French writer's *Asmodée* at the Comédie Française last year. The hearty uncles and the disappointed aunts are poorly observed and the irony lacks point. The denunciation in *Murder in the Cathedral* was sometimes effective, but in this play it is tired and mechanical and sinks to the Auden-and-Isherwood level of

We all of us make the pretension  
To be the uncommon exception  
To the universal bondage.  
We long to appear in the newspapers  
So long as we are in the right column . . .

'It is a drama of contemporary people speaking contemporary language' runs the publishers' blurb. This is a fair specimen of 'contemporary language':

What's the use of asking for an evening paper?  
You know as well as I do, at this distance from London  
Nobody's likely to have this evening's paper.

It is clear that Mr. Eliot has turned to drama in order to give the statement of his problems a wider application, but his choice of verse-drama is less easy to justify. The great dramatic poets of the past wrote their works in verse because verse could do something that prose could not. Mr. Eliot's choice of verse, however, seems to have been prompted merely by the belief that poetic drama is a good thing and ought to be encouraged. 'Contemporary language' can hardly be transposed unchanged into a verse-form; it only becomes effective when it is deliberately stylized as it was in *Sweeney Agonistes*. It is a curious fact that since Mr. Eliot took to writing drama his verse has become pro-

gressively less dramatic. There is scarcely anything in the present play which can be compared for dramatic effect to the public house scenes in *The Waste Land* or even to the experimental *Sweeney*. Its main interest, indeed, is as an illustration of the decline which began with *The Rock* and continued through *Murder in the Cathedral* and *Burnt Norton*. There are lines which have something of the tensiety of *Gerontion*—

And death will come to you as a mild surprise,  
A momentary shudder in a vacant room

—but these are occasional flashes, and for the most part one has the impression that Mr. Eliot is imitating his early successes, that his verse is an artful verbal construction which does not correspond to any fresh perception. When he writes, for example,

I came  
Once for a long vacation. I remember  
A summer day of unusual heat  
For this cold country

—one feels that the 'unusual' has been put in from without in order to give 'significance' to a commonplace statement. In other places the trick becomes crude and vulgar:

Weaving with contagion of putrescent embraces  
On dissolving bone.

A comparison between

What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow  
Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,  
You cannot say, or guess, for you know only  
A heap of broken images, where the sun beats,  
And the dead tree gives no shelter, the cricket no relief,  
And the dry stone no sound of water

and

To and fro, dragging my feet  
Among inner shadows in the smoky wilderness,  
Trying to avoid the clasping branches  
And the giant lizard. To and fro.  
Until the chain breaks

scarcely needs comment. The passage from *The Waste Land* expresses a genuine, a tragic sense of instability which is completely realized. In the second, the 'inner' shadows and the 'clasping' branches seem to be another example of the artificial heightening of tired feeling.

One of the most effective devices in Mr. Eliot's earlier poetry was the sudden transition from a mood of great emotional intensity to a mood of calm symbolized by references to the sea or flowers or, in *Ash Wednesday*, to religion. The device is used in *The Family Reunion*, but here it seems to be a technical device and no more.

You bring me news

Of a door that opens at the end of a corridor,  
Sunlight and singing ; when I had felt sure  
That every corridor led only to another,  
Or to a blank wall ; that I kept moving  
Only so as not to stay still. Singing and light.

\* \* \* \*

I only looked through the little door  
When the sun was shining on the rose-garden :  
And heard in the distance tiny voices  
And then a black raven flew over.  
And then I was only my own feet walking  
Away, down a concrete corridor  
In a dead air.

The 'corridor' does not stand, as it does in *Gerontion*, for a state of genuine perplexity ; it is a convenient term with no more reality than the facile 'rose-garden,' while any doubt that might remain about the value of the passages is at once dispelled by putting them beside the relevant passage in *Gerontion* whose extraordinary economy provides the final comment on the prolixity of *The Family Reunion*.

The main impression left by *The Family Reunion* is one of hopeless confusion. It is a patchwork of uncoordinated attitudes. Something of the mood of *The Waste Land* persists in a diluted form ; but though Mr. Eliot no longer feels as he did, he seems unable to free himself completely from the old mood. On the other hand, the fresh attitudes—the religious interests and the

desperate striving after some sort of transcendental experience which was so pronounced in *Burnt Norton*—are not adequately realized. The result is that the play has no centre and no significance. The confusion leaves its mark on every line of the verse ; it is apparent in the looseness of texture, the preference for vagueness and abstraction and in the muddled images. The most disquieting thing about the play is the poet's inability to translate perceptions into words. Thus we have :

That apprehension deeper than all sense,  
Deeper than the sense of smell, but like a smell  
In that it is indescribable, a sweet and bitter smell  
From another world. I know it, I know it!  
More potent than ever before, a vapour dissolving  
All other worlds, and me into it.

' Apprehension ' gives the illusion of precision on account of its philosophical connotation and Mr. Eliot makes the most of it by putting ' that ' in front of it. In fact, it is the blurredness of the original perception that makes amplification and repetition necessary because nothing has been apprehended. So we have the repeated ' deeper ' and ' sense ' eked out with ' indescribable,' while the singularly unfortunate emphasis on ' smell ' makes any sort of clarity impossible.

The sententious, moralizing tone which has been growing in Mr. Eliot's work since *The Rock* is still more evident in this play. His hero declares to the family :

All that I could hope to make you understand  
Is only events: not what has happened.  
And people to whom nothing has ever happened  
Cannot understand the unimportance of events.

It is not the assumption of profundity or the casuistry that irritates one, but the sense of moral superiority which in Mr. Eliot's later work takes the place of sympathy with the plight of others that marked the earlier work. What makes the superiority peculiarly exasperating is the failure to define ' what has happened ' and the repeated attempts to fob us off with counters. Thus the most intelligent of the aunts observes



Harry has crossed the frontier  
Beyond which safety and danger have a different meaning.  
And he cannot return. That is his privilege.

In another passage the same speaker remarks:

It is possible  
You are the consciousness of your unhappy family,  
Its bird sent flying through the purgatorial flame.  
Indeed it is possible. You may learn hereafter,  
Moving alone through flames of ice, chosen  
To resolve the enchantment under which we suffer.

In both cases the ' privilege ' and the ' chosen ' are the reality, and the ' frontier ' and the ' enchantment ' the shadow. The use of the theological terminology and the borrowings from Dante in the second passage are used to give a semblance of significance to what is said, but they somehow fail to convince the reader of the reality or the importance of the dilemma. It is characteristic of Mr. Eliot's later verse that though superficially impressive, very little of it will bear detailed examination. When one analyses it, it turns out to be a mere verbal construction. So we have:

What you call the normal  
Is merely the unreal and the unimportant.  
I was like that in a way, so long as I could think  
Even of my own life as an isolated ruin,  
A casual bit of waste in an orderly universe.  
But it begins to seem just a part of some huge disaster,  
Some monstrous mistake and aberration  
Of all men, of the world, which I cannot put in order.

The ' normal ' can only be defined in negative terms provided that the writer has a precise apprehension of what is not normal, and of this apprehension there is no trace. In the same way, a sense of disorder implies an apprehension of order, but Mr. Eliot's ' orderly universe ' is not real, neither is his ' chaos.'

When *Burnt Norton* appeared a reviewer in *Scrutiny* took the view that it marked the beginning of a new phase in Mr. Eliot's development. Although I have never felt able to share this view, the case made out for it was a strong one and could only be

received with respect. It seems to me to be impossible to defend *The Family Reunion* on these or on any other grounds. It fails where *Burnt Norton* failed, but it is without the redeeming features of that poem, and criticism cannot be forestalled by remarking jauntily (as Mr. Eliot's hero does after one of the 'big scenes')

That was only what I should like to believe.

I was talking in abstractions . . .

For there seems no reason to hope that we shall ever get anything but abstractions after this.

MARTIN TURNELL.

## EUCLID ON HELICON

*THE POET'S DEFENCE*, by J. Bronowski (C.U.P., 7/6).

'I have tried to write criticism as reasoned as geometry,' writes Dr. Bronowski in his *Foreword*. If we applaud the intention, we do so with the caution appropriate to the terms in which it is couched. And indeed, Dr. Bronowski would seem to share with Euclid the illusion that in geometry we have a body of purely *a priori* reasoning; for his ruling principle appears to be a desire to empty literary criticism of any suspicion of empirical content. 'Criticism has too long helped itself with false poetic tricks and with vague words, Value, Form, Content.' So Dr. Bronowski wipes the slate clean, dispenses with the factual assumptions involved in possessing a critical apparatus, and proceeds to the careful logical analysis of the concept of poetry as revealed in the beliefs of poets.

After such dignified assurances that he has nothing up his sleeve, it is a little disappointing to find Dr. Bronowski producing the well-thumbed pack of critical pasteboards, Nature, Virtue, Wit, Imagination and so on, and proceeding to endless shuffling of them; to find a flaw in his argument is to feel that one has caught someone cheating at Patience. But although in this part of the book Dr. Bronowski rarely says anything important enough for one to feel stirred to disagreement, the ground covered is not without its

value. The way in which Shelley's *Defence* is played off against Sidney's *Defence*, for example, might be adopted by English students as a useful Tripos tactic ; and in general the scope of Dr. Bronowski's argument, taking in addition to these Jonson's *Discoveries*, Dryden's essays, the *Preface to Lyrical Ballads*, and Coleridge's *Biographia*, will entitle this work to a place beside Mr. Henn's *Longinus* and Mr. Lucas's *Tragedy* among those books so popular with University English students in the early weeks of May.

His main accusation against Shelley, that he held the imagination to be concerned merely with the sympathetic interpretation of the feelings of man as a social animal, is justified, and he points relevantly to *Prometheus Unbound* in support of his contention : he might have pointed also to the comparable *naïvetés* in the contemporary Spenders and Day Lewises. But his own view of poetry, which he derives from a liberal reinterpretation of Sydney's ingenuous meditations, takes him so far from the contaminations of the world and the senses that reference to anything so tangible as the movement of a poem becomes practically blasphemous. 'The mind of man,' he tells us, 'has a knowledge of truth beyond the near-truths of science and society. I believe that poetry tells this truth.' Thus far a guarded concurrence is possible ; but Dr. Bronowski has more explicit claims to make for poetic truth. 'I believe that the mind of man has a steady shape which is the truth . . . The rules of reasoning are part of this steady shape without which man cannot be . . . The urges of passion are part of the steady shape of the mind. All these are true in all societies. They make an absolute truth, which I think is the truth of poetry.' It is surely the audacity of genius that contrives to class the 'rules of reasoning' and the 'urges of passion' under a single head. A sympathetic reader might re-interpret Dr. Bronowski as wishing to say that the kinds of relations that poets see between facts are not the same as the kinds of relations that scientists see between facts : and that the apprehension and communication of such facts is a matter inseparably bound up with emotion. But to try to establish the superiority of poetic truth on the basis of an *a priori* psychology, and by the enlistment on its side of the Laws of Thought as against science, is too ingenuous a form of snobbery, calculated only to make literary criticism ridiculous.

There are times when it makes Dr. Bronowski's criticism ridiculous. The world of science is the world of sense, so the superior truths of poetry can have no parley with the senses. 'Poetry . . . is an ideal set against the senses and against worldly life.' Any kind of criticism, therefore, which concerns itself with such sensual matters as imagery or movement, is seen as an attempt to reduce to the terms of Dr. Richards's pleasure-psychology. Hence the criticism of the Original Sinner Coleridge is 'false and shoddy.' When Dr. Bronowski indicates how Coleridge's theories lead naturally to the pseudo-scientific attempts of Richards to reduce all poetry to a resolution of conflicting emotions, his criticisms are just ; when he points to Coleridge's misapplication of psychology to the analysis of Shakespeare's plays, his remarks are relevant ; but when he thereby supposes himself excused from any attempt to discover if and how a poem operates—an undertaking which Coleridge's approach first made possible—he virtually abandons any serious attempt at literary criticism.

'Wordsworth is the last of the line of poets which runs through Sidney, Jonson, and Dryden.' It is to such observations as this that Dr. Bronowski's approach to poetry leads him ; for having abandoned the world of sense, he finds himself left with nothing but the world of Ideas ; and what is important in a poet, therefore, is his common stock of ideas in general and his views on poetry in particular. 'That is why the plainest past criticism is the criticism written by poets : because their poems tell us what their words and their standards mean.' Now such an approach to poetry is not without its uses. In the case of some poets, the structure of their ideology is so closely related to the quality of their verse that a consideration of the former can be relevant to an evaluation of the latter. For this reason Dr. Bronowski's remarks on Shelley and Swinburne are interesting if somewhat unoriginal, and his comments on Housman and Yeats are in places quite cogent ; but it is unlikely that he will succeed in convincing by an analysis of these poets that begins and ends with their ideas anyone not already convinced. And the severe limitations of this approach become obvious when it leads Dr. Bronowski to find *All For Love* a better play than *Antony and Cleopatra*, and to class Keats with Tennyson and Swinburne as 'a poet with little moral thought.'

It is possible that I have misunderstood Dr. Bronowski's

thesis ; I would like to believe it so, and it seems not unlikely, as he appears to have included among his initial acts of grand renunciation a refusal to avail himself of the normal resources of English grammar and syntax ; though it should be added that his atomic periods are entirely appropriate to the train of his thought, which operates as on an Inner Circle, progressing in short dashes, and returning every so often to the place from which it started. It is to be regretted that the initial starting-point was so ill-chosen.

R. O. C. WINKLER.

## MODERN POETS IN LOVE AND WAR

*THE STILL CENTRE*, poems by Stephen Spender (Faber and Faber, 6/-).

*POEMS AND SONGS*, by Gavin Ewart (The Fortune Press, 4/6).

*POEMS*, by F. T. Prince (Faber and Faber, 5/-).

*AUTUMNAL JOURNEY*, a poem by Louis MacNeice (Faber and Faber, 6/-).

The blurb tells us that Mr. Spender considers his new book of poems as ' an exploration of the human condition—the analysis of experiences at once intensely personal and common to all men.' This is an aim that does not, come to think of it, seem startlingly unexpected in a poet, and it's because Mr. Spender fails, on examination, to stand up to it at all sturdily that one feels suspicious, despite his overt pretensions, of his validity *qua* poet. One doesn't, heaven knows, want a poet to ' re-orientate ' one's nervous system by, as it were, incessantly prodding one in the solar plexus, but I think one might reasonably look for a little more excitement than Mr. Spender offers. I believe he means well, and some of his sentiments are certainly very true ; only I might be tempted to suggest that Mr. Spender's verse reminds me of what was, after the works of Bartók and Webern, perhaps the most memorable feature of last year's I.S.C.M. festival—a programme-note to Koffler's *Third Symphony* which informed us that ' apart from the Third Symphony Koffler has written two other symphonies '—were it not that this statement boasts a quality of classical perfection

that Mr. Spender's incompetent technique cannot hope to rival.

Since the time of his first volume Mr. Spender's verse has grown more difficult in the sense that it is more difficult (or more boring) to read. It is sometimes unintelligible because it is rhythmically flaccid and it is rhythmically flaccid because it is unintelligible—because, that is, it manifests no more clarity of feeling than Mr. Spender's critical prose commonly exhibits clarity of thought.

There swims within my life a fish  
Which is the deep and glittering wish  
Evoking all the hills and waters  
Of sensual memories.  
Your image and those days of glass  
Being lost become no loss  
But change into that image  
At the centre of my thought,  
Itself no less precious  
Than the original happiness.

As far as I can make out from the context this seems to mean that a week-end in the country may be well worth remembering. And passages like the following

Now all these  
Drink their just praise from cups of waves ;  
And the translucent magnifying lights  
Purify the achievement of their lives  
With human bodies as words in history  
Penned by their wills.

are so grossly incompetent and rhythmically inert as to make no impact on the mind at all. A verbal trickle off the back of the duck of the psyche, as Spender himself might have said ; for it is because his verse is rhythmically dead that he gingers it up with the hypodermic syringe of his ' unexpected ' metaphors.

These metaphors are really of the same frivolous order as those of such a confessed and antiquated naïve as mr. e. e. cummings. For instance, in the first of the two passages quoted above I do not see why that particular wish should be a fish rather than an alligator, a koala or a steam-roller ; nor, when Mr. Spender

speaks of 'the gilt wave of desire' can I understand why the wave is gilt, an epithet which, if it is anything more than decorative, suggests deceit and *guilty* and thus confuses rather than illumines the apparent point of the poem. Similarly, if by the inappositeness of 'the fat autumn evening streets' and 'the prolonged shadows that lie down like cut hay' Mr. Spender intends mildly to emulate Mr. Eliot's coalescing of apparently irreconcilable ideas he offers no justification for it in the texture of the poems: one experiences Mr. Spender's 'daring' metaphors no more than his clumsy or conventional rhythms, they merely administer a series of jolts to which, become habituated, one soon responds as faintly as to the soporific rumble of an express train. Speaking of trains reminds me, however, that the Spenderian simile has its occasional careless raptures. I like to think of all England lying beneath the Midland Express 'like a woman with limbs ravished'; and it must have been an anxious moment for the young lady who 'filled her linen night-gown as the air fills a balloon' when her lover 'buried his eyes in her breasts like rough quartz in a mine.'

When a theme does emerge Mr. Spender's interests do not seem to have changed substantially from those of his blue-eyed youth. The Spanish war reminds him that war is futile and that the young man whose tweed cap rots in the nettles would have been 'a better target for a kiss'—(*Ultima Ratio Regum* is actually one of the simplest and most sincere poems in the volume, with only one blatantly manufactured image). For the rest, he still has a proper indignation about slum children and hopes that one day they will run naked and uninhibited into the Empsonian books; he still writes nostalgic Georgian love-poems that (almost) innocently rhyme:

Now I climb alone to the dark room  
Which hangs above the square  
Where among stones and roots the other  
Peaceful lovers are ;

he still dislikes the tweeded bourgeoisie but wistfully believes in 'the furred and future bloom Of their falling falling world'; he still has fits of the jitters with his 'guts on skewers of pity' and he still writes poems about trains: he continues to indulge in passages of a wearied Shelleyan rhetoric:

O law-giving white-bearded father,  
 O legendary heroes, sailing through dreams  
 Looking for land when all the world was sea  
 And sunrise, O bare-kneed captain of my first school,  
 O victors of history, angry or gentle exponents  
 Of the body as an instrument which cuts  
 A pattern on the time, O love  
 Surrounding my life with violet skies . . . ;

and he retains his affection for snow, aeroplanes, and flowers. All these things Mr. Spender does less prettily than in the earlier volume ; the lisping lyrical swell—' abrupt and charming mover,' after all quite fetching in its simply sentimental way—is gone and for it the ' philosophical content ' of his more ambitious ventures is poor consolation. Listen to these lines about Napoleon—I select them at random :

All your thoughts were pouring yesterdays  
 With blood and flags and smoke and men  
 To fill the hollows of today.  
 Being all memory you forgot  
 The narrow shaves of time. But the lean world  
 Famished by you, and eating back again  
 Upon your fall, in all its bones and hunger  
 Was—like the unemployed that stare  
 With eyes from the stone edges—avidly Tomorrow.  
 The kings of yesterday might still have saved  
 Your throne for you—because you were a king.  
 If one, touching your shoulder,  
 Could persuade you to measure  
 Your claims against your present power,  
 The stature of your body in a mirror,  
 And not against that superhuman shadow  
 Struck by the sunset across your empire . . .

\* \* \* \*

And so on for pages until one can't  
 Help talking like this and can't help thinking  
 It must be easy to write verse like Mr. Spender's when  
 He's being most pretentious. And when he's simple



Then it's simpler still, because one can make it  
Rhyme, if one wants, but if one can't  
Think of a rhyme it doesn't  
Matter, because this poetry's modern . . .

None the less, Mr. Spender's verse has, as we have seen, the decency to deal with romantic or childish themes in a manner that is usually most highminded. Only seldom do Mr. Auden's tricks obtrude ('boys, grass, the fenced-off deer . . .'), whereas Mr. Ewart is an Audenesque echo. The collocation is unfair to Auden for Ewart's sensibility is really closer to that of Cole Porter and Noel Coward. These Poems and Songs contain one admirable sentiment:

Beware of sex  
With its thousand necks,

as the Bishop said to the Chorus Girl. But the bad girl apparently wasn't listening, being lost in her bad, bad thoughts.

Between the Scylla of Mr. Spender's gauche high-mindedness and the Charybdis of Mr. Ewart's slick low-mindedness it is pleasant to tread a wary path with Mr. F. T. Prince, a poet whose name is new to me. Compared with Spender he is professional, an accomplished craftsman if one of limited invention; compared with Ewart he manifests an adult and cultivated mind. The virtue of his verse is its lack of pretension; he is content to do a small thing and to do it charmingly. His rhythm is never difficult or complex but it is surely poised, in its way a delicate and a subtle achievement. Mr. Prince's voice may be a slender one, lacking strength and variety; but it is a genuine voice and a personal manner.

I suppose Mr. Prince has read Pound's translations from the Chinese for his manner has much that is Chinese in its urbane suavity, its quality of acceptance and resignation, as well as a suggestion of Pound's maliciousness. But his touch is tenderer, kinder, more gossamer-like. Consider such a poem as *False Bay*:

She I love leaves me and I leave my friends  
In the dusky capital where I spent two years  
In the cultivation of divinity.  
Sitting beside my window above the sea

In this unvisited land I feel once more  
 How little ingenious I am. The winter ends,  
 The seaward slopes are covered to the shore  
 With a press of lilies that have silver ears.  
 And although I am perplexed and sad I say  
 'Now indulge in no dateless lamentations:  
 Watch only across the water the lapsed nations  
 And the fisherman twitch a boat across the bay.'

Here there is a typically aloof yet sensitive response to deep but very simple emotion, clinching introspective feeling in the 'concrete' particularity of the last line, and it is a quality of acceptance and tranquillity, with a hint of ceremony in the verse's gentle gait, that is very rare in modern poetry. This 'Chinese' feeling is noticeable even in such a tiny bagatelle as *The Token* in which the movement and the selection of detail give a personal overtone to verse that seems purely descriptive; and it informs too the touching—the epithet seems, without any pejorative implication, appropriate—half-rhyme and shift of rhythm at the end of *In a Province*:

The tears that fall from my eyes have wet my hands  
 Holding the reins of my horse. How many hours  
 Were sweet to me because of women! These showers  
 Bring to my mind that day among pale sands,  
 Call to mind how one came with me unwillingly  
 On an evening warm as another country's noons  
 And all seemed of long ago among those dunes  
 And under a clear sky, under a clear green sky.

Like the Chinese poet Mr. Prince can weep to think of Time and Loss and Separation and the other fine themes that are as old as the hills, and yet preserve a glint in his eye, remain detached and almost amused. He can treat serious themes lightly, but his frivolous poems are never merely frivolous:

*To a Man on his Horse*

Only the Arab stallion will I  
 Envy you. Along the water  
 You dance him with the morning on his flanks.  
 In the frosty morning that his motions flatter

He kindles and where the winter's in the wood  
I watch him dance you out on delicate shanks.  
And lashes fall on a dark eye,  
He sheds a silvery mane, he shapes  
His thin nostrils like a fop's.  
And to do honour to his whiteness  
In remembrance of his ancient blood  
I have wished to become his groom  
And so his smouldering body comb  
In a simple and indecorous sweetness.

This is of course a very slight poem but its charm presupposes technical control and surety of intention. Its peculiar fragile wit is manifested in the sprightly movement and in the use of assonant rhymes (note for instance the insouciant twist given to the last line) ; and it is present in almost all Prince's most characteristic images (' that fever over, To which my passion lit Dry sticks of unlucky wit ').

In the longer poems *Words from Edmund Burke*, *The Tears of a Muse in America*, *An Epistle to a Patron* and *Chaka*, Mr. Prince adopts a fluid conversational technique that—both in brief phrases like ' that cunning agony of rectitude ' and in the texture of more extended passages such as

Among gossip of moist leaves, tongues of an upstart court  
To my gaudy establishment as general  
Many emissaries, bitter, brought the crane's feather  
And offered many tokens to placate, including  
Sea-shells and a quantity of melons

—somewhat resembles a flimsier version of Mr. Pound's *Propertius* and that possibly suggests, not that Mr. Prince is influenced by, but that he has a lively admiration for, the dramatic verse of Ben Jonson. The tone is of course whimsical rather than tough, and the point of these more elaborate exercises seems to me to emerge but vaguely. Nevertheless, each contains passages that are a lesson to Mr. Spender in the agile manipulation of conversational metres, and the high-fantastical, rather than oriental, mythological furniture that, as it were, inhabits the poems, as well as an occasional preciousness of phraseology, are quite distinct from the comparable

effects in such a poet as Wallace Stevens, for the verse remains human and passionate within its narrow convention. How human it is one realizes most clearly, I think, in passages in which the movement reminds one of the later Yeats:

A beautiful girl said something in your praise.  
And either because in a hundred ways  
I had heard of her great worth and had no doubt  
To find her lovelier than I thought  
And found her also cleverer, or because  
Although she had known you well it was  
For her too as it had been once for me  
Thinking of her: I thought that she  
Had spoken of you as rare and legendary . . .

Because you are all things and because  
You show the world the glitter in the face  
Of that all-but-extinguished race  
Of creatures who delight in and desire  
Much less the fuel than the fire:  
I wish that when you call for supper, when  
You sit down, guests and serving-men  
May seem light-bearers planted on the stair,  
Lights in the roof, lights everywhere:  
So that as if you were a salamander  
Your sensuality may wander  
In a community of flames and breathe  
Contentment, savouring wine and wreath.

The first part of this quotation from *To a Friend on his Marriage* has not Yeats's sardonic vigour but in its slenderer, more whimsical fashion has a comparable mellowness and proud austerity. The fantastic element in the latter part of the quotation is Mr. Prince's own contribution but it is, more humorously, perhaps more frivolously ironic, an extension of the same attitude. I do not think we need complain that Mr. Prince's verse embraces so little or that his longer poems are incompletely realized; slight though it is, his verse comes nearer to being poetry than that of many a contemporary versifier who is ten times as earnest. And if defence is called for, Mr. Prince provides it himself in a passage from a

poem called *At a Parade* which beautifully reconciles his exotic with his Yeatsian characteristics: (the naïve image in the fifth line seems to me in the context justified, and delightful)—

We watch the only eagles in the world,  
How under the crimson flags they have unfurled  
They ruffle in furs and plumes . . .

And standing together and watching you and I  
Have thrown our hearts like caps into the sky.  
For as I serve you, so I find  
I would be another of that kind  
And martialize  
Luxurious lucid mind and eyes  
To celebrate the moving world.  
And though a madness is unfurled,  
Though rage and greed would be at blows,  
And Europe's noisier than a bawdy-house,  
What else can I be good for but to praise  
And to defend the world, even in these days?

This passage is one of the very few in Mr. Prince's volume that contains a *direct* reference to the 'criminal century' we live in; yet these amiable and elegant musings could have been produced only by a man alive in and aware of this century. On the other hand Mr. MacNeice's long pseudo-autobiographical poem is, like his earlier volumes only more so, ostensibly concerned with the Contemporary Situation but doesn't convince us that he is, as a poet, aware of anything at all. No doubt thousands of nice young men felt as Mr. MacNeice felt about the September crisis and about their experiences during these 'disturbing times'; they didn't therefore feel entitled to publish their ruminations as poetry or even as prose, and prose, dished up in metre, is what *Autumnal Journey* virtually is. The Contemp. Sit. is a dreadfully threadbare business in itself and in Eliot, in later Yeats or in *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* it's the distinguished sensibility that makes it absorbing. It is all very well for Mr. MacNeice blandly to remark:

All that I would like to be is human, having a share  
In a civilized, articulate and well-adjusted

Community where the mind is given its due  
But the body is not distrusted,

—he might as well be the Poet Laureate airily demanding a tall ship and a star or so to steer her by ; of the Contemp. Sit. his verse remains not a criticism but a symptom.

This poem is not as muddle-headed as Mr. Spender's because there is nothing in it to be muddle-headed about, but I think it is even more boring. It ambles along in an Audenesque music-hall jog-trot for 96 pages of which not one is either better or worse than the next, in which there is no trace of a personal sensibility or of any ability to do anything with words except to manipulate them in accordance with facile and established formulæ. All the stock ingredients of the Auden-Isherwood drama are introduced in due order—the retired generals and spinsters in deck-chairs, the symbolic poodle, ' his eyes inept and glamorous as a film-star's,' the parodies of jazz songs, the ironies at the ' Glory-to-God-in-the-Lowest-and-peace-beneath-the-earth ' level, the descriptions of factories, rubbish dumps (rhyming with petrol pumps) and bungalows ' in lath and plaster ' ; and all the ' rich ' families have sagging tennis-nets on spongy lawns in dripping shubberies. There is also a lot of the ' Come on boys, we aren't afraid of bogies, Give us another drink ' stuff, with the bogies winning on points all round, despite the handicap of a coil of rope round the neck, and there is an invocation to

the hunchback,

The gentleman farmer, the village idiot, the Shropshire Lad  
To insulate us if they can with coma  
Before we all go mad.

The general conclusion seems to be that things are Pretty Bad, or as Mr. MacNeice more picturesquely puts it, ' the peaks have fallen in like dropping pastry,' but this is a conclusion that in these days even the toughest materialist can hardly have been dubious of beforehand. Mr. Auden's earliest verse spoke with a new voice if one uncertain of intention and *Sweeney Agonistes* once and for all transmogrified the twentieth-century jitters into ' something rich and strange ' : but the trouble with MacNeice's poem, which lives in no personal creation, is that we have heard it so

often before. Shake up all the Auden-Isherwood-Day-Lewis-MacNeice poetic and dramatic productions of the last few years, dump them out helter-skelter, and the sense of them would not be substantially altered. They are all identical and already have the quaintly lavendered air of a period-piece.

But it must not be thought that Mr. MacNeice offers us no consolation. He ruefully admits that

It is so hard to imagine  
A world where the many would have their chance without  
A fall in the standard of intellectual living  
And nothing left that the highbrow cared about,

and he's a bit disillusioned about the value of The Classics—

. . . how one can imagine oneself among them  
I do not know,  
It was all so unimaginably different  
And all so long ago—

but none the less he can indulge in little monologues of moral reflection during the course of which he decides (without perhaps a dazzling display of originality) that one's personality can properly manifest itself only through contact with other people and that on the whole life is better than death if only because one is inescapably born to it. The final pages are optimistic in a brusquely practical way:

What is it we really want?  
For what end and how?  
If it is something feasible, obtainable,  
Let us dream it now,  
And pray for a possible land  
Not of sleep-walkers, not of angry puppets,  
But where both heart and brain can understand  
The movements of our fellows ;  
Where life is a choice of instruments and none  
Is debarred his natural music . . . etc.

So ' the equation will come out at last ' ; one can only hope it will.

But how can anyone pretend—how can Mr. MacNeice pretend, as he seems to when he remarks in a preface that *Autumnal Journey* is not a 'didactic' poem since poetry must in the first place be honest—that this stuff has anything to do with the mysterious processes, the developed sensibility, out of which is born poetry? for any fool who has read the right books could—and many of them do—manufacture it by the yard. Mr. MacNeice's first volume betrayed a semblance of real if unformed talent; in this present poem his feelings about such events as the September crisis do not, at their best, differ materially from those of the average sensible 'man in the street,' and to his feelings about more personal topics the man in the street would be most often ashamed to own. This book would not be worth reviewing at all did one not know that it will be acclaimed as a poem of 'some importance' whereas Mr. Prince's modest little volume will pass unnoticed. Mr. Prince can make a tiny sort of poetry out of a whimsical and private-seeming meditation; Mr. MacNeice has been to the Spanish war along with Mr. Spender but it does not seem to have made any impression on him except in so far as it provides more incident to be juggled into the all-too-familiar arabesques. And when Mr. MacNeice falls in love on page 20 he hasn't much to say about the young woman apart from this:

Frivolous, always in a hurry, forgetting the address,  
 Frowning too often, taking enormous notice  
 Of hats and backchat—how could I assess  
 The thing that makes you different?

Well reelly, even Mr. Porter has grown weary of answering this one: *O là le p'tit quelqu' chose!*

Nowadays they call it (don't they?) UMPH.

W. H. MELLERS.



# SCRUTINY

## A Quarterly Review

*Edited by*

D. W. HARDING

L. C. KNIGHTS

F. R. LEAVIS

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# THE CLAIMS OF POLITICS

**I**N the present social atmosphere the invitation to express political conviction and engage in political action grows more and more insistent. To have given much of one's time to 'culture'—in the sense of literature, the arts, and in general the finer developments of human possibility—is not readily accepted as a reason for political non-commitment ; often, in fact, it is taken to carry with it special political obligations. Whether these special obligations exist, and if so what they consist in, are the chief questions dealt with in the following symposium.

The editors were anxious to assemble as representative a set of opinions as possible, but had some disappointments, especially in regard to a promised Marxist contribution.

## RICHARD CHURCH

### THE INDIVIDUAL AND POLITICS.

Only the criminal, or the person with a sick mind, will deny that every man and woman is under an obligation to serve the community in some way or other. That sounds an obvious statement. But the implications are not so obvious. For one thing, everybody at some time is in a pathological condition, during which he rebels against his duty, and doses himself with cynicism in order to relieve the pain in his social conscience.

It might be useful to say something about this condition, for I believe it is a fairly common symptom amongst the middle-aged, the generation to which I belong. It is an interesting generation because it caught the brunt of the activities, or at least the immediate activities, during the last war. The seeds of social malaise were laid then. They are sprouting now.

If a man has had a wound, he evolves a semi-conscious technique of gestures to protect the tender spot from all contacts. He does the same thing if his mind has been wounded. The callous flesh causes a paradoxical reaction of hyper-sensitiveness. The tendency is to avoid touching things. Society, and all the obligations it entails, is a very hard and knobbly thing. Men and women

between the ages of forty and fifty shrink from that contact. They have a sort of fixation arising from the painful memories of what was demanded from them in 1914-1918.

In addition, people reaching this time of life have a more natural tendency towards inaction and withdrawal. The fires of youth are waning, its ideals and enthusiasms burned out. Once that happens, it is impossible for an honest person to go on believing in generalizations and all those crude categories on which young people built their political faiths. It is then that he begins to waver. He is not shown much mercy by the generation treading on his heels. 'Just for a handful of silver he left us,' said Browning of Wordsworth. But it is not so simple as that. The trouble is that nothing is simple, as the maturing mind begins to discover. The issues between political parties are discovered to be unreal issues, the aims of political parties to be unreal aims.

It is noticed by the temporarily cynical adult that social crusades are often led by scoundrels, and reactionary movements by men of charm and integrity. He observes too that some of the most socialistic legislation is put through by Conservative Governments (look for instance at the work being done by Sir Samuel Hoare to-day in the Department of the Home Office). As against this, I recollect that during my quarter of a century in the Civil Service, most of it spent in the Ministry of Labour, I saw two Labour Governments in office. During those periods all progress was arrested in the Department. It was a very disillusioning experience. But for that matter, to serve in a Government department is always a disillusioning experience. One sees the politicians behind the scenes. One has to wash their dirty linen in private. It is rather a disgusting occupation.

I do not exaggerate when I say that I believe demagogues to belong to the criminal class. They are parasites who make nothing and produce nothing, except trouble and despair. And what is so depressing is that Trades Unions seem to be a breeding ground for this particular type of politician. That is why the Labour Party is such a sorry spectacle to-day. That is why, too, the enraged person who wants to get on with the job of social building is almost inclined to turn to syndical-anarchism, as a system which openly proposes to do away with the professional politician and all his *words*. Guild socialism is now a museum

piece. Scientific necessity has passed it by. But I believe it contains the nucleus of common-sense practicalness out of which a modern state will be able to function handsomely and smoothly and at the same time advance the liberties of the individual. What is so galling is that at the present moment, the totalitarian régimes are experimenting with the doctrines of guild socialism and perverting them toward the suppression of individuality. Now that the purposes of war are being forced upon the democracies, they too are experimenting in the same direction, but alas with the same results. And this is only another example of the confusion between precept and practice.

What is the intelligent individual to make of it all? Where can he find a foothold? The answer is that he has to find many footholds. For a political belief and the conduct consequent upon it are to be compared with a stepping-stone in a series across a river. They are expedients in an activity that is dynamic, not static. A man stands still upon one of these stones only when he is paralysed with fear. That unfortunately is a common condition which overtakes us all when we find ourselves surrounded by the river of events, personalities, accidents and all the other continuously exerted forces. Tolstoi realized the extent of that fear. He wrote 'War and Peace' trying to show how that fear was the basis of so much hero-worship, self-drugging vanity and obscurantism. Christ saw it and dodged the issue by advising men to 'render unto Cæsar that which is Cæsar's.'

But the question is, What, and how much, is Cæsar's? We can use any symbol we like, but we cannot escape from the problem. Whether we call the Organized State a Democracy, a Soviet, a Nordic Reich, or the Roman Catholic Church, we still have to make up our minds how much we are prepared to do towards the articulation and functioning of that society. Our decision is important both to ourselves and to the community, because on it depends whether the State is to be a servile one or a benevolent one, and whether the individual is to be fettered or acquiescent. Between these two antinomies lie the problems of to-day; lie war, lie misery, cynicism, and the eventual decay of human dignity and joy as hitherto recognized.

I therefore have to ask myself how I am to come to that important decision. Am I prepared wilfully to use only a small

fraction of my intelligence and my experience of life, in order to be able to conform to the mechanical programme of any of the political parties? Do I believe in any political party, or in any political ideology? The answer is that I do not. There is no such thing to believe in. The very word 'politics' implies something that can never be static. I, as a representative figure of citizens of my age, have come to a period of life where I see all definitions of the problems of society as false circumscriptions of the facts involved. Those definitions are made by men as fallible and ignorant as myself. I do not believe them; they are theories, not realities. At the best they are *ad hoc* experiments; measurements of necessity. By the time I have registered my decision to act (or vote) for or against them, they will be obsolete as the moods and events from whose conflict they sprang. I cannot adhere to a particular political issue. But parties exist on such issues. Dictatorships exist on them. In order, therefore, to try and keep up with the needs of reality in government, I must draw nearer to anarchism in my beliefs.

But that is merely laughable, like young love. It is charming, it has about it the qualities of the Golden Age, the morning of life in an under-populated world. We live in an over-populated world, one which is bursting the coat of old cultures and economic necessities. Science is forcing upon us centralization of control. And that tendency affects ideas as well as food supply and other physical factors. This is an age of mass-production. What is the fastidious artist, scientist, or religious initiate to do about it? If he keeps out of the *melée*, will he escape? Can he find an ivory tower, and if he does will he be bombed or gently taxed out of it? In a world increasingly noisy, standardized, obvious, will he be able to feed his mind on the solitude, the *objets d'art*, the unique experiences which it demands if life is to have any value at all for him?

The answer to that is the usual sly one of the sophisticated mind. The person with developed cultural interests has sufficient knowledge of history to be assured that 'brains count,' that the fastidious person will always be able to slip round the corner out of the noise of the circus, where he can find a meal consisting of something a little more epicurean than bread. This is not said in cynicism or contempt. It is not cynical or contemptuous to know

that the great majority of mankind is satisfied with the crudest of cultural values. One man's meat will always be another man's poison. It would be hard luck for the small minority if they were not invariably much more clever and unscrupulous than the majority in getting what they want.

That being so, they must be prepared to make certain compromises, even to maintain a society which they see tending more and more towards this dreaded standardization. Even when there is only one make of motor-car in the world ; only one crooner at the earth-central microphone ; only one form of ready-made garment, there will still be some means of exquisite excitement for the subtle-minded to extract from that environment.

There remains meanwhile the needs of common decency ; and that is a moral matter rather than an æsthetic one. No matter how cultured we may be, how esoteric in our tastes, we are dangerous criminals if we remain socially passive while other people are starved by artificial scarcity, robbed of a common birth-right by caste distinctions, and denied the right to make their own lives within certain sane limits. To secure the family of mankind against such indignities as these, I must be prepared to put aside my contempt for politicians, my inability to believe that good men always act with justice and scoundrels always with fraud, my lack of faith in static doctrines for the control of dynamic realities. In a word, I must be prepared to give my vote to a political party, and my service if necessary to a bureaucracy. But I consciously refuse to make up my mind which political party it shall be, and what particular department I shall function in. Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof. And action is always an evil because it cuts out nine-tenths of the truth.

### GEOFFREY DAVIES

The subject proposed for discussion is a difficult one and offers two questions.

What is the ideal relationship between the highly cultured expert, poet or priest, and the ideal community?

Secondly, what is the best aim in present circumstances?

The first question is an academic one. It is not possible here to say more than that, even in an ideal state, it is debateable

whether the man of exceptional talent in matters that do not immediately concern the organization and working of the State, will help the community more by adding his own flavouring to the taste of the whole or by concentrating on the development of his own genius.

A community of ideal administrators that turned out only ideal administrators for the next generation would be as valuable to humanity as an ants' nest.

In the present world, with things as they are, the exceptional man finds himself involved in an acute struggle with the community for the preservation of his own identity. This is obvious in the totalitarian states where the man who is unlike his fellows finds himself faced with unconcealed resentment and hostility. As in Plato's 'Republic' there is no place for music in the state.

In communities still faintly aristocratic, as in England, the opposition is not so open or obvious but it is very real. The eccentric is still tolerated but it is on the understanding that his eccentricity shall be harmless.

The absolute pacifist, for example, may still preach his views without molestation, but if he attempts to spread their practice by speaking to soldiers, his punishment would be heavy.

The easier, and I think the wrong, solution for the individualist thinker is to let the State go by ; to offer to pay it a reasonable rent in the form of taxes, and the performance of other civic duties, in return for accommodation in his private room where he may work and think unmolested provided he does not annoy the other tenants.

The great objection to this course is that it is a concession to the community which deprives the community of a part of itself and that part the most valuable, and in saying this, the standpoint of the writer must be made clear. It is the old one that the duty of the individual to his fellow men can only be discharged in communities, but the entering into a community and the discharge of that duty are conditional upon the community fulfilling its proper, physical, mental and spiritual functions—the physical well-being of its citizens and the establishment of order and justice ; the spread of education and the cherishing of 'civilized' behaviour ; the encouragement of religion and reconciliation with God.

It is to-day clear, I suppose, to all that our Christian civil-

ization has somehow taken a wrong turning and as it progresses down the wrong road, puts an increasing strain on the ropes—this is going to be a mixed metaphor—has somehow overgrown itself in the wrong ways and shapes and is putting an increasing strain on its roots.

Since this is so, to remain aloof is to encourage the worse tendencies. It is only postponing the date of reckoning and increasing the chances of defeat.

If these premises are correct, it is the duty of every citizen who, by nature or education, is mentally or spiritually above his neighbours, to continue his own personal development but at the same time to watch every political development around him with the closest attention ; to regard himself as a member of a new Holy Office charged with the combating of the appalling and rampant heresies all around him ; to employ his interest and authority diurnally to the re-tracing of the road and the recognition of reality. This is the duty of them all—a vital duty and, incidentally, one of the reasons why I have written this article.

### CHRISTOPHER DAWSON

The expansion of Politics from the narrow limits of utilitarian Liberalism to the all-embracing claims of the totalitarian community-state has already had a revolutionary effect on Western civilization and may produce still greater changes in the future. It threatens to confound and destroy the traditional forms and standards of culture and to reduce it to the crude undifferentiated unity of a mass civilization. The man of letters no less than the philosopher and the religious teacher has lost his former spiritual freedom and is in danger of becoming the conscious or unconscious servant of the ruling powers, whether those powers are the anonymous servants of material interests or the acknowledged leaders of a totalitarian party State.

In these circumstances our primary duty is to keep our heads clear and not allow ourselves to be confused by the over-simplification of the issues which has always been the besetting sin of the political partisan. For though the problems that confront us are new, they are not without analogies in the past. It is not the first time that there has been a conflict between the claims of



politics and the claims of culture. In the first place it is important to realize the essential disparity of political phenomena. There are at least two distinct types of political interest which can be sharply differentiated. There are professional politics—the business of government ; and there are ideological or spiritual politics—the spirit of loyalty to communal ideals. From one point of view politics are a profession and the politician is a specialist, like an engineer or a financier, whose function it is to transact public business in an efficient and economical manner. But from the other point of view, politics is a mystical vocation, and the politician is the man who is conscious of a mission to save his people or who has the power to inspire men with an enthusiasm for a common ideal.

It is obvious that these two forms of political action have very little in common. A man may be an admirable chairman of committees and yet be quite incapable of making men willing to die for the policy that he favours, while the man who is able to fill his followers with an invincible faith in their common cause, may be entirely incompetent when it comes to practical politics.

It seems to me that a great part of our difficulties is due to the confusion and contamination of these two types of political psychology and political action. For though it is easy to distinguish them in theory, they inevitably tend to overlap in practice. The great statesmen and political leaders—Cromwell, Abraham Lincoln and the rest—have always been the men who were able to combine both functions, to be at once the personal embodiment of communal ideals and the practical organizers of public affairs ; in much the same way as the great Churchmen have been those who managed to unite the essentially dissimilar functions of the ecclesiastical administrator and the religious teacher.

Moreover this duality of political life is not confined to the professional politician ; it is no less apparent in the life of the ordinary man. The latter has to fulfil the practical duties of citizenship. He has to take his part in the business of local government, to vote in elections, to sit on councils and committees and to undertake his share of public burdens. But he also has duties towards the community of a wider and more spiritual kind. These are the virtues of patriotism and devotion to the common good which need not express themselves through any of the recognized

channels of administrative activity but which are nevertheless the very essence of citizenship. But though these are political virtues, they also transcend politics, since they are directed towards a community which is wider and deeper than the State. Our conception of that community depends on our ideology. If we are Liberals it is Humanity, if we are Conservatives it is the Nation, if we are Communists it is the World Proletariat, if we are Fascists it is the Race. But so far as I know, there is no creed or ideology which makes *the State* the final social end and excludes the concept of a wider community to which our deepest loyalty is due.

It is in this sphere that the main responsibilities of the thinker and the man of letters are to be found. Practical politics are the concern of the practical man, and the business man may be better equipped than the philosopher and the poet to take part in the transaction of public business. But when it comes to the consideration of the final ends of political action, to the criticism of the ideologies on which that action is based and to the creation of a social consciousness and sense of responsibility which transcend the limits of the political community, it is clear that the thinker and the writer have a more important contribution to make than the man of action or the political orator ; and it is their primary function to serve society with intellectual integrity in this sphere rather than to take an active part in party politics or in the actual work of government.

This principle is far from being generally admitted at the present day. The individualism of nineteenth century culture had already effaced the old frontiers between the spiritual and temporal powers and weakened the traditional hierarchy of social and spiritual values, and now the coming of the totalitarian state marks the emergence of a new type of politics which recognizes no limits and seeks to subordinate every social and intellectual activity to its own ends. Thus the new politics are in a sense more idealistic than the old ; they are political religions based on a Messianic hope of social salvation. But at the same time they are more realist since they actually involve a brutal struggle for life between rival powers which are prepared to use every kind of treachery and violence to gain their ends.

It is easy to condemn the dictators and the politicians for thus opening the gates to the flood of evil and violence which

threatens to overwhelm our civilization. But the primary responsibility does not rest with them: it rests on the intellectuals who prepared the way for them by their theoretic justification of violence and terrorism. It was the Communists who first popularized the new political theory and technique, and the Communists in Russia were *par excellence* the party of the intelligentsia. And on the other side, it was men of letters like Nietzsche and Sorel, Marinetti and D'Annunzio who were the spiritual fathers of Fascism and whose influence transformed a national movement against defeatism and social disorder into a totalitarian cult of the will to power.

If the intellectuals abandon the interests of culture and cease to recognize the primacy of spiritual values, we can hardly expect the politician to do otherwise. Setting aside political Messianism and the exaggerations of totalitarian ideologies, the task of the modern statesman is quite important enough to occupy his whole attention. He is responsible for the safety of the State—*salus reipublicæ*—and we cannot blame him for subordinating everything else to that vital task, any more than we can blame a ship's captain for putting the safety of his vessel before the interests of his passengers. But the State, like the ship, is a means and not an end and though the public interests with which the statesman is charged are vital to the existence of the community, they are not its only interests or even its highest interests. The intellectual, on the other hand, is the servant of those wider interests which transcend the sphere of politics. He works not merely for the State but for the community of thought which extends far beyond the limits of any single political society.

The trouble is that this conception of a community of thought has never received adequate treatment from modern social theorists. Either it has been rationalized by the philosophers into a universal ideal which has no sociological content, or it has been regarded as the ideological aspect of the political and economic society which is the ultimate reality. But any serious historian, and most of all the historian of literature, must realize that there is a community of thought, which, no less than the political society, is the result of historical development, but which has its own laws of growth that are not limited by political or even racial frontiers. For example, mediæval Christendom and mediæval China formed two distinct and independent communities of thought, and the fact that

the Mongol Empire united Russia and China in one political system did little or nothing to bind these two spiritual worlds together. On the other hand modern Europe and modern America do not form two separate communities of thought in spite of their differences of culture and their political independence. English and American literature are mutually dependent, and religious and intellectual movements which have their origin on one side of the Atlantic may have as much influence on the other side of the ocean as in the land of their origin.

If this is so, it is clear that the social responsibilities of the man of letters cannot be identified with his duty as a citizen or subordinated to the interests of the State of which he is a member. He is bound to think of the interests of culture as a whole and to direct his activities in whatever direction he can serve them best. This does not mean that literature must be denationalized or cosmopolitan ; for the nationalism of a literature is a different thing from political nationalism. Indeed the periods when a literature gives fullest expression to the national spirit and tradition are those in which its international influence is greatest.

At the present time it seems to me of the first importance that literature should recognize that it has national and international responsibilities quite distinct from those of politics. There is an obvious political conflict between the Western powers and the states of the Axis, but there is no such conflict between their literatures. French and Italian literature are not Democratic and Fascist literature, they are just French and Italian literature, and though the political conflict will normally find some literary expression it will not involve any fundamental opposition between the two. In fact while the political systems are mutually exclusive, the literatures both belong to a common tradition of culture which transcends politics and, to some extent, even nationality.

But this ancient European tradition is threatened to-day by a new barbarism more formidable than anything in the past, since it possesses an infinitely stronger technical and scientific equipment. I am not referring to any particular political state or régime, but to the general tendency to social mechanization which treats science, literature and culture as nothing more than instruments in the struggle for power. The claim of politics to organize the State as a mass community is fatal to the old ideals of culture. If it

could be completely realized, it would mean the end of thought and the end of history. Human society might thus attain a higher degree of unity than it has ever possessed in the past, but it would be a soulless unity, like that of the societies of the insect world. In such a society there would be no room for criticism or personality or any free spiritual activity and without these things it is difficult to see how literature could continue to exist.

GEORGE EVERY, S.S.M.

#### CRITICAL JUDGMENT IN POLITICS.

The majority of our people still engage in political decision only at a general or at a municipal election. They are then required to decide which of two or more individuals is the most fit and proper person to sit in Parliament or upon the town council, to deliberate and to give a vote upon national or local affairs. But the historical circumstances of the last fifty or a hundred years, the decline of local life in parish, ward and borough, and the growth of what we are accustomed to call mass-civilization, have in practice changed the decision from a decision between individuals to a decision between parties, and made the House of Commons more and more a piece of political machinery to register decisions which are in fact made outside its walls. The chief decisions may indeed be made by members of Parliament, but as Conservative or Labour leaders.

At the same time there has been an increasing tendency to talk as if legislation was made not by Parliament but by the people. The fact that the House of Commons registers the comparative strength of two organizations which are spread all over the country reinforces this impression. The less the individual member is able to take up a political attitude himself, the more the individual citizen believes that he has at least as complete a political attitude as that of his M.P. The only political attitude is one of assent to a party programme. Even those who dissent from both parties often express their dissent by assent to a programme formulated by some private and confidential conference. And yet both the National Government and the Labour Party inspire widespread distrust. Neither possess the confidence which our system of general elections is supposed to secure to a Government.

I believe that our system has been perverted out of its true shape by an increasing tendency to identify British constitutionalism with Continental and American Democracy. There is nothing wrong with the democratic element in our constitution as such. It is perfectly reasonable that a large number of people who are engaged for the most part of their lives in doing something practical which does not involve political judgments, should be asked at intervals whether they are convinced that a change of government is necessary, since the vagaries of government so directly affect them. Moreover the prospect of such a judgment can be a real check on the irresponsibility of statesmen. But the franchise was gradually enlarged to make the judgment of the people less sectional, less liable to be deflected by local and personal influences from the government upon the electorate, not to bring British institutions into conformity with the dogmas of universal suffrage, or even with the earlier Commonwealth doctrine 'that the people are, under God, the original of all just power.' The people do not originate political power, normally. They endure it, and sometimes they can endure it no longer but must overthrow it, and then the result claims to be their creation. It is not. The English Revolution was the creation of the great Whig families, though it won the victory because James II drove the squires and the country parsons beyond their patience. The French Revolution was the creation of the Paris bankers, though it came about because the peasants had lost their patience. The Russian Revolution was the creation of a few organizing geniuses, though it happened because the army would fight no longer and no one else was ready to take the reins.

Political judgments then are normally negative and critical. The people do not make positive political plans. They approve those which are made, or they refuse them by way of a revolution or the ballot box. The political plans are made by the politicians, who want to make other people feel that the plans are theirs, that the party programme belongs to all of them. But they can't.

It is part of the job of those who have been trained in literary criticism, history, philosophy or theology, to take the lead in exposing this situation, at least not to pretend that they sincerely believe in the efficacy of every single item on the party programme, when in fact all that they mean is that they prefer this set of politicians to that. But are their preferences of any more value

than anyone else's? I think they are, if they have brought all the resources of their education to bear upon the issue that they can judge, and not wasted them in irrelevant efforts to arrive at another kind of judgment.

In so far as the politician appeals to argument, he generally appeals to-day to scientific argument, to a supposedly exact political science based on economics and supported by impressive statistics. This is because of the immense prestige of the positive sciences in our secondary schools and modern universities and through them in the elementary schools. Scientific language makes it all sound very well-informed. But there is another kind of politician who eschews it and plays upon a prejudice against science, created in many minds by the development of specialization and by the dogmatism and triviality of scientific specialists upon things they know nothing about. He proposes with some *éclat* to establish standards in realms of life which the scientific publicist and politician have left uncharted, where the ordinary young man and woman do require guidance. He will give them a religious politics and a political religion. Intelligent people are suspicious of both kinds of politician for some critical reasons. They suspect that the scientific sociological study of modern civilization leaves out factors which the science-trained mind regards as mere matters of taste and opinion. On the other hand they are still more suspicious of Lord Baldwin, with his pseudo-religious cult of moral re-armament, because he and his like are talking in a vague and imprecise way about things which can be discussed in a precise and objective way. They are spell-binding an uncritical public as the second-class novelist spell-binds them. It is not quite so obvious that the same kind of spell-binding can be done in pseudo-scientific terms by those who can use the vague prestige of the scientific expert in economics and psychology to produce an impression of objectivity. It is right that we should denounce Fascism as anti-rational, but we may not always prefer a politics which talks in rationalist terms. Anti-rationalism may walk in a pseudo-rationalistic dress.

It is the first task of the critic to attack the passivity which responds automatically to emotional stimulants in fields where there are no criteria in action, where the very existence of objective criteria is often held to be inconceivable. It is his second task to criticize those who try to apply the wrong criteria. And *Scrutiny*

may have reached a stage where the second task is the more important. Those who are not anxious to be critical, objective and in a sense scientific in their judgment of political, moral and literary issues, are not very likely to read what we have to say. And this means that nearly all the readers of *Scrutiny* have a bias against the Government Party and on the whole in favour of the more intellectual approach of Left politicians, who are at least using argument. The question is 'what kind of argument?' If it is of the wrong kind, if the economics of the Left are only superficially scientific and evade the real issue of what economics is or can be about, then there may be a case for enduring the alternative Government until they have clarified their ideas somewhat.

This leads to a question which I have deliberately postponed. Can the critics influence the politicians as well as some of those who elect the politicians? I think this is a very difficult question. It was easier while the old two-party system obtained, when political life was still a social unity based on public school and university education, and the statesmen read Homer and *Culture and Anarchy*. But now in the eyes of the rising politicians the intellectuals are simply experts, and experts in subjects far more limited and specialized and literary than the art of ruling men. Scientists are useful because they may devise means here and there to get this or that plan of offence or defence or re-organization to work more cheaply and efficiently. Clergymen are useful if they will use their influence with the middle classes in support of this or that plan hatched in political quarters. But artists are only useful as advertisers or propagandists, and there is no place for the philosopher or the literary critic or the critical theologian in party politics.

Then are these people to give up trying to influence politics, and instead to help the numerous other non-politicians to make their occasional political judgments with some critical insight into the nature of the rival programmes, and a remembrance that the choice is between two evils? That seems to me unnecessarily defeatist. There is a real chance that sooner or later quite a large number of scientists, economists, psychologists and even politicians will come up against imponderables in their own field which they cannot understand without assistance from outside it. The element



of pseudo-religion in their outlook and in that of their opponents will become more obvious to themselves and to their disciples. We need a critique of this, which psychology cannot by itself provide. I do not think that literary criticism can do all that is wanted, but I do believe that the part of a politician's message on which literary criticism can best be exercised is not his specific proposals, or even the rhetoric which he uses to put them across to various audiences, but the total response to a whole situation implied in his political outlook. This cannot be extracted out of current political literature without the assistance of detailed literary criticism, but the critic could help the philosopher and the theologian to assess, not only the more obvious weaknesses of political rhetoric, but the kind of response to life implied in recent Marxist literature and in some movements for the defence of democratic liberty and international law which look rational enough in the abstract. To do this diagnosis he need only be a critic. He need not be an authority on the economics of nationalization.

If we tried to save people from the wrong kind of political myth, and not only from the wrong kind of poetry and fiction, I believe that it would become more obvious than it is that there is a right and healthy kind of total response to the whole concrete situation of the individual in politics. The intellectual is always inclined to expect too much from political action, but the remedy for his fever is not inaction, but a critical concern first of all with the issues he does know, education, public libraries, town planning, for instance. In that he can learn to apply his sensibility to social issues without blunting it with bogus enthusiasms, until he sees what can be done in the present spiritual situation of the world, and what can't be done without a more radical change which a political revolution might prepare, but could not achieve. It is a commonplace that the system is wrong, but the system is rooted in an attitude, and any radical criticism of the system must lead sooner or later to a criticism of the attitude which underlies the structure of modern civilization. If that is a perversion of Christianity, as I believe it is, then sooner or later we must either scrap Christianity or make a deliberate effort to decontaminate it. But the task of detailed diagnosis is not yet complete, and there we still need more scrutiny.

## MICHAEL OAKESHOTT

So many good people nowadays take an interest in politics and even arrive at some kind of political action that the view that it is the duty of everyone to do something of the sort has become almost a commonplace, and not to recognize the claim of politics is taken to indicate some defect of character or sensibility. Nevertheless, this alleged obligation of everyone to take part in immediate political activity is, I believe, a gross delusion ; at best it is based upon a perverted social sense, at worst upon a false scale of values. I leave on one side such quasi-political activity as the exercise of the vote and the informal discussion of political questions. Most intelligent people will wish to be informed about what is happening in the world of politics and may perhaps wish to cast a vote. The more difficult question is the alleged obligation of everyone to take some more extended and more active part in politics.

Now, I take it that political action could reasonably be considered a universal duty if either of two conditions were satisfied. If political activity were the only adequate expression of a sensibility for the communal interests of a society or of mankind, or if it were incomparably the most important and most effective expression of such a sensibility—in either of these cases it might fairly be held that a universal duty exists to take part in it. Let us consider what truth there may be in either of these views about the nature of political action.

For any sensitive and educated person to feel that he takes little or no part in the promotion of the collective interests of his society or of mankind may provoke in him a sense of having failed to perform one of his duties. And the belief that those who take part in the direction or administration of the social or political system have the monopoly of what is called social service, that public activity is the sole genuine and adequate expression of public spirit, leads such a person to suppose that his whole duty remains unfulfilled unless, besides going about what he thinks of as his business, he takes an active part in the public affairs of his society. In the less sensitive the same neglect coupled with the same belief leads to the less creditable feeling of being outside the main stream of the life of their time. But it is a false belief, disastrous at once to the life of a society and to the conduct of its affairs. Just as

the similar belief that the true, unhindered service of God was possible only to members of a religious order or officials of the Church (that is, to those who made a profession of it) promoted a false and irreligious division between those who were called to serve God and those who were not, and gave a false importance to the former, so this belief about social service promotes the erroneous view that some activity is disconnected from the communal life of a society and gives a false importance to the activity of those who engage in public life. Our sense of the unity of social life degenerates ; and by elevating unnaturally one form of communal activity, other forms, no less communal, are unnaturally depressed. But the truth is that nothing we do is unconnected with the life of our society, no activity is private in the sense of being without its place or context in the corporate social life, and no man who feels it his duty to take a part in the promotion of the communal interests of his society need consider himself to have failed merely because he has not entered the world of politics. The activity of a music-hall artist is no less certainly connected with the common life of his society than that of a Prime Minister or functionary, personal relationships are not less communal than public and legal relationships, and a sense of public duty which is satisfied only by some form of public activity is a sense which rests upon and helps to perpetuate an illusory division in the life of a society. Our choice, then, lies not between a life exclusively devoted to merely private interests and one connected with the communal life of our society, but between a life which has its place either here or there in the common life, a life which touches the life and interests of our society either in this way or in that.

But the defence of this alleged obligation of everyone to take part in immediate political action may be conducted on different lines. Instead of asserting that such action is a universal duty because it is the only genuine and adequate expression of a public spirit, it is suggested that the kind of communal activity we call political is of superior importance to any other kind, that it is incontestably the most effective expression of a sensibility for the common interests of a society. But there is, I believe, little or no truth in this suggestion. Politics is a highly specialized and abstracted form of communal activity; it is conducted on the surface of the life of a society and except on rare occasions makes remark-

ably small impression below that surface. If politics were the continuous consideration and reconsideration of the life and order of a society from the bottom upwards, and if political activity involved the continuous recreation of the communal life, then, no doubt, for good or for ill, it would be highly important ; but it is not. A political system is primarily for the protection and occasional modification of a recognized legal and social order. It is not self-explanatory ; its end and meaning lie beyond itself in the social whole to which it belongs, a social whole already determined by law and custom and tradition, none of which is the creation of political activity. Political activity may have given us Magna Charta and the Bill of Rights, but it did not give us the contents of these documents, which came from a stratum of social thought far too deep to be influenced by the actions of politicians. A political system presupposes a civilization ; it has a function to perform in regard to that civilization, but it is a function mainly of protection and to a minor degree of merely mechanical interpretation and expression. The things political activity can achieve are often valuable, but I do not believe that they are ever the most valuable things in the communal life of a society. A limitation of view, which appears so clear and practical, but which amounts to little more than a mental fog, is inseparable from political activity. A mind fixed and callous to all subtle distinctions, emotional and intellectual habits become bogus from repetition and lack of examination, unreal loyalties, delusive aims, false significances are what political action involves. And this is so, not because the politically active are under the necessity of persuading the mentally obtuse before their activity can succeed ; the spiritual callousness involved in political action belongs to its character, and follows from the nature of what can be achieved politically. Political action involves mental vulgarity, not merely because it entails the concurrence and support of those who are mentally vulgar, but because of the false simplification of human life implied in even the best of its purposes. There are some, no doubt, who feel the need for the ' illusion of affairs,' and to these the superior importance of political activity, even in normal circumstances, will appear beyond question. But it is little more than a personal and psychological importance, and cannot be made the basis of a universal duty. In normal times, then, the superior importance of political activity over all other

expressions of sensibility for the communal interests of a society, cannot, I think, be maintained. But at times of political crisis, when a society seems to be in danger of destruction, and when the work of protection appears to be more important than anything else, there is a special temptation to believe in the overwhelmingly superior importance of political activity. Nevertheless, this also is a temptation to be avoided. The work of protection is never of primary importance ; and when, in times of political crisis, it appears to be so, that is merely because, in the absence or poverty of creative activity, protection has usurped the place of recreation. On occasion a society may be preserved and may survive by means of political action, but to make it live requires a social activity of a different and more radical character ; and its life is as often threatened by political success as by political failure.

Political activity as I understand it, then, is neither the only adequate expression, nor the overwhelmingly most important expression of a sensibility for the communal interests of a society or of mankind. And consequently I do not think that there is a duty for everyone to take part in it. And if it is found that there is a necessary service to society which can be performed only on the condition of an abstention from political activity, then it may be said that those who are capable of performing such a service have a duty not to engage in politics. Nothing I have said should be taken to mean that I think political action is a wholly valueless expression of a sensibility for the communal interests of a society ; in my view it is a legitimate expression, and one which it is impossible for a society to go without. It is probably true that any man who can be strongly tempted to give himself up to political activity belongs to the world of politics, and he will not go wrong if he follows his genius. He will use his intelligence to reflect on questions of political importance ; as a writer he will become a publicist. In action, if he is prudent and lucky, he may be successful. He will retain his fundamental views and opinions almost unchanged, being without time or inclination to examine them afresh ; and he may take on the appearance of a leader. But in every society there are, I believe, some for whom political activity would be a perversion of their genius, a disloyalty to themselves, not because they have little or no part in the promotion of the communal interests of their society, but because their part is one

which it is essential that a society shall have performed and which it is difficult if not impossible to combine with political activity. And among them, I believe, are those whose genius and interest lies in literature, in art and in philosophy.

The grounds on which I distinguish this section of society from all others in respect of political activity are clear to me. Their business is with the values which are the real life and character of a society. They are not (what they are sometimes called) the guardians of the values of society. Every society has its values, but if they are *guarded* at all, it is the politically active who do it. A society requires not only that its civilization should be guarded, but that it should be recreated. And the genius of the poet and the artist and to a lesser extent of the philosopher is to create and recreate the values of their society. In them a society becomes conscious and critical of itself, of its whole self ; just as, in the politically active, it becomes conscious of its political self. The last corruption that can visit a society is a corruption of its consciousness, and from this the politically active cannot protect it. If a society is to be saved from a corrupt consciousness it will be saved not by having its values and its civilization protected, but by knowing itself and having its values recreated. Indeed, political activity involves a corruption of consciousness from which a society has continuously to be saved. To ask the poet and the artist to provide a programme for political or other social action, or an incentive or an inspiration for such action, is to require them to be false to their own genius and to deprive society of a necessary service. What they provide is action itself, but in another and deeper sphere of consciousness. It is not their business to suggest a political remedy for political defects, but to provide an actual remedy for more fundamental defects by making a society conscious of its own character. The emotional and intellectual integrity and insight for which they stand is something foreign to the political world, foreign not merely in fact, but in essence. This integrity and insight cannot be introduced into that world without changing their character ; and to attempt to introduce them makes a chaos of what is otherwise a restricted but nevertheless ordered view. It is not their business to come out of a retreat, bringing with them some superior wisdom, and enter the world of political activity, but to stay where they are, remain true to their genius, which is

to mitigate a little their society's ignorance of itself. This is the truth of the neglected half-truth that the artist and the poet and the philosopher are and should remain separated from 'the world'; not because they have no part in the promotion of the communal interests of mankind, but because to be free from the world is the condition of their contribution. Societies, in fact, are led from behind, and for those capable of leadership to give themselves up to political activity is to break away from their true genius. And a society in which this becomes common will, in a short while, be a society without leaders, a society ignorant of itself and without the power of recreating itself. And this is true not less in times of political crisis than in others. Culture, it is true, is indebted most to the politically weakened periods of history; but in a society which circumstances encourage to embrace an exclusively political view, it has still its part and its friends their duty.

### OLAF STAPLEDON

#### WRITERS AND POLITICS.

There are two extreme views about the proper attitude of writers to politics; and in this matter what is true of writers is true also, with appropriate qualifications, of all whose interest and ability lead to any kind of cultural activity. It is often said that such people should ignore politics, since their business is to maintain the life of the mind, and political passions are destructive of precise thinking and refined feeling. On the other hand it is often said that to-day the 'cultural people' ought to devote all their energy to saving civilization from the disaster which so obviously threatens it, and that this is to be done only by political action.

I agree that civilization, and therefore culture, are in very grave danger, and that in such circumstances all who recognize the danger ought to do everything in their power to overcome it. But in my view the cultural people, and particularly the writers, have a very special and urgent function in the common task of saving civilization. Unless this function is fulfilled, the work of politicians cannot succeed. The cultural people alone, and only if they can thoroughly wake up to the special character of our age, can maintain and strengthen the civilized spirit. This does not mean that they are necessarily the most civilized among us, but

simply that it is their office to develop and propagate the ideas and feelings which are essential to civilization. In our day they cannot effectively do this in the 'ivory tower.' Though they must constantly seek inspiration from the great expressions of the developed mind in the past and in the contemporary world, and must maintain an inner detachment from political strife, they must also, in my view, keep themselves sensitive to current affairs, and play a part in our common struggle.

To defend this position I must give a summary analysis of the main issue of our age. To-day the human race is passing through one of its major crises, if not the greatest crisis of all. Science gave it the possibility of transforming its circumstances so as to found a world-society in which every individual should have the means for a full and free life, and in which the main goal of social policy should be the development of individual capacity and the enrichment of the culture of the race, through world-wide community. This opportunity was missed. The Marxian explanation seems to me correct, so far as it goes. Through uncontrolled economic individualism, the vigorous bourgeois class was able to prostitute science and mechanism for personal, or at best for class, ends. To-day the same class holds power ; but its present members are very different from those who founded industrialism. Our commercial and financial oligarchy is on the whole effete, unimaginative, incapable of coping with the novel situations of the contemporary world. Because these people are nurtured in a strong but no longer appropriate tradition, they are mostly unable to recognize that the social order which they support is no longer able to fulfil social needs. In particular it cannot release the great new productive powers which should be benefiting all mankind. Thus the bourgeois oligarchy inevitably resists the natural growth of modern society. Increasingly it is forced by the logic of its position and its mentality, to destroy individual initiative and responsibility, to suppress truth and propagate lies. In fact it has to adopt policies lethal to true civilization. Further, since it is forced into imperialistic rivalries, it has increasingly to direct the energies of men toward war, and to discipline them for the defence of the bourgeois state. As I see it, there is no hope for civilization till the economic oligarchy is abolished.

If this were the whole truth of the matter, I should urge all



who are concerned for culture to drop everything and work for the revolution, or for a united front against Fascism, which, at least in one aspect, is the extreme expression of the anti-social tendency of modern capitalism. We must neglect culture, I should say, until we have saved civilization, which is the only ground in which culture can thrive.

But the Marxian account of our troubles, though true so far as it goes, is not the whole truth. To defend civilization we must do more than attack its enemies. We must re-affirm and clarify the civilized spirit, which is simply the developed human spirit. For consider Fascism. Though it is indeed partly the product of Capitalism, there is more to it than this. Capitalism attempted to use the Fascist and Nazi movements for its own ends, but it has been captured by them. How has this happened? As I see it, Fascism, as a disposition in men's minds, is partly a blind and negative protest against a civilization which has proved itself insincere, which has preached liberal idealism and Christian brotherhood, but has practised gross materialism and economic exploitation. This protest has gone so far that it has spurned not only the vices of a particular civilization but the essential values of *true* civilization, in fact the values which are distinctively human, and which civilization alone can fully realize. These values I take to be, in the old language, reason and love ; or the free use of intelligence, and the mutual responsibility of self-conscious and other-conscious individuals. Instead of these, Fascism pathetically exalts the blind sociality of the gregarious animal, along with ruthless might, superstition and the cult of the tribe.

The rise of Fascism has given us a grim object-lesson to show that the essential values *are* essential. It is teaching us to purge our minds of false ideas about civilization, such as that it is the equipment of the archaic tribe with modern weapons, or that it is *merely* the resultant of economic forces. Fascism is teaching us to form a clear and passionate conviction as to what the truly civilized, the developed way of behaving really is. Unless we do this, the attempt to resist Fascism will merely breed Fascism in ourselves.

If the cultural people are to fulfil their task of propagating the civilized kind of experience and behaviour, they must be prepared to go about their business in such a way as to take effect. Neither the civilized spirit nor culture can in our day be maintained,

developed or propagated by intellectuals who live in a world of their own, taking in one another's washing. Those who would make a stand for civilization to-day must lay themselves fully open to the fertilizing influence of the contemporary world, with its prodigious troubles and its new hope. On the other hand the cultural people must not, as such, try to be politicians or political propagandists. They lack the special knowledge and skill. Propaganda seeks simply to spread information, rouse the will for political action, and organize. Some writers may sometimes take part in sheer propaganda, but this is not the writer's special function. His task is to absorb experience and express it as it appears to the civilized mind. To-day the outstanding object of experience is the contemporary world-crisis. If he would fulfil his function he must assimilate aspects of this, so that he may present the civilized reaction to it, either by direct commentary or by creating imaginative symbols of it.

The political people make a huge mistake when they affirm that this kind of thing is not urgent, and should be postponed till Fascism has been defeated. For Fascism is infectious. As the prolonged crisis develops, many of those who are concerned for civilization tend increasingly, and in spite of their best intentions, to fall into a mood very like the Fascism which they oppose. Anxiety breeds a craving to insist on rigid discipline, to suppress idiosyncrasies, to find scape-goats, to indulge in tribal passions. Thus arises a kind of inverted Fascism, or 'para-Fascism,' a yielding to the temptation to use in service of civilization methods essentially barbarous and destructive of civilization. Dictators can well afford to indulge in policies which tend to de-humanize their subjects by undermining their intellectual and moral integrity ; for it is to the interest of dictators that men should be stupid and insensitive. But the defenders of the distinctively human way of life must abjure such policies. They must appeal to civilized motives, not to tribal passions. Their propaganda must be humanizing, not brutalizing. They must never, for the sake of an easy temporary victory, indulge in methods which tend to destroy the precious germs of the civilized spirit. Some earnest political people naively suppose that, even if for the sake of political victory we have to neglect and violate the civilized spirit for a while, we shall easily restore it when the trouble is over. This is a tragic error. In

betraying the spirit we betray the citadel, no matter how many superficial victories we win in the field. In this conflict we must not adopt the enemy's methods. As well might birds seek to conquer fishes by plunging under water with them and holding them till they drown.

Cultural people, of course, are of many sorts. Some are more, some less, in contact with social and political affairs. Some have more aptitude than others in this field. Some can serve best by criticizing contemporary culture, and particularly letters, so as to expose by concrete examples the ways in which it falls short of the truly civilized temper, and especially the respects in which it is vitiated by assumptions bred of class dominance. Very different is the part of those whose power is mainly 'creative,' a vague word which I must not here define. Their office, now as always, is to produce works of imagination which symbolize and epitomize aspects of man's struggle to adjust himself to his environment. In some periods, perhaps, this is best done in seclusion. There are moments in history when the vital issue is the problem of the individual's orientation, or the refinement of feeling, or the sharpening of the instruments of thought. Even to-day there may be exceptional writers or artists who are justified in exploring aspects of reality which must seem irrelevant to most of their contemporaries. These must judge for themselves whether they are pursuing will-o'-the-wisps or laying up treasure for a future generation. But surely in this crucial phase of man's career every creative writer who is tempted to choose the ivory tower should earnestly consider whether his work is likely to be so very valuable to the future that he is justified in denying the claims of the present. For it is at least possible that if these claims are neglected culture will have no future.

So far as the writers and readers of *Scrutiny* are concerned, each, I suppose, must discover for himself what he can do, taking into account his special equipment. In many cases, no doubt, the claims of profession or trade will inevitably use up most of a man's time and energy. But clearly those who are engaged in teaching can constantly exercise a civilizing influence, so long as they do their best to relate their teaching to the contemporary world. And all, whatever their work, should be able to stand for the civilized spirit in their personal intercourse, and sometimes on public platforms or in the press.

For *Scrutiny* itself there may be a great future if it boldly fulfils the office of scrutinizing not only current literary work but also current affairs, always, of course, from the point of view not of party politics but of the civilized intelligence. In particular it should set itself to expose cases of insincere or muddled argument and illicit emotional appeal in all kinds of public expression. It should from time to time criticize the programmes and the activities of all the political parties, not from the technical political point of view, but in respect of their unspoken assumptions and political philosophy. It should be not only critical but constructive. It should seek not only to defend but to develop the civilized spirit in relation to the changing conditions and changing aspirations of our world. Thus it might come to play a crucial part in the revival and transformation of the ideals of Western civilization.

## L. SUSAN STEBBING

### PHILOSOPHERS AND POLITICS.

It is an old saying of Plato's that philosophers should be kings ; then only will the troubles of the polis, or state, cease. Plato conceived kings primarily as educators rather than as legislators, whilst executive problems seem to have worried him not at all. The immense differences between an Ancient Greek city-state and a modern ' Great Power,' the serious defects in Plato's ' constructed state,' and the radical divergence of his conception of democracy from ours need not here concern us. I am not among those who hold that Plato was the first Fascist, although I should find his ideal city an intolerable habitation. It is, however, still worth while to ask whether Plato was correct in assuming that philosophers have any claims to be regarded as peculiarly fitted to intervene in political affairs, or, alternatively, whether the claims of politics are especially stringent in the case of philosophers and, if so, how they can meet those claims.

At the outset it is desirable to clear away a misconception sometimes entertained by those who might be expected to know better. ' Whom, Socrates, do you take to be the genuine philosophers?' The young man's query was pertinent. The proposed connexion of philosophers and politics seemed as absurd to the Greek of the fifth century, B.C., as to the Englishman of to-day.

Socrates' reply was in effect that a philosopher is 'a spectator of all time and of all existence.' We may modify this grandiloquence by adopting the phrase of another great writer: a philosopher is one 'who sees life steadily and sees it whole.' Even this is too magnificent and, no doubt, meaningless. Nevertheless, it is necessary to bear in mind what Plato meant by a genuine philosopher before we accept or reject his contention that all would be well with a State where the education of the young was controlled by philosophers carefully trained from birth to fulfil that high function. It is not rash to assert that, judged by Plato's criterion, none of us are genuine philosophers. This platitude might not seem worth enunciating. Yet, when twenty years or so ago, the British Institute of Philosophy was founded, an enthusiastic leader-writer in the *Manchester Guardian* entitled his leader 'Philosophers as Kings,' pointing joyfully to the fact that the imposing list of members of the Council included two ex-Prime Ministers as well as the Prime Minister himself. Unfortunately, of these three gentlemen two had no claims, one hardly any claim, to be regarded as a philosopher even when judged by our low standards. The anonymous founder of that Institute himself believed that the political and social troubles of our times could be remedied if only philosophers would take the lead. He thought that their refusal or their inability to do so was simply the outcome of their too great attachment to academic questions. It is, I think, germane to the topic of this symposium for me to give a brief indication of his hopes and to point out the illusions upon which, in my opinion, those hopes were based. I regret that I must refer to him by the anonymous pronoun 'he.'

There were troubles in China; it was sometime before the Manchukuo 'incident.' He felt that the Institute's *Journal* should publish articles 'dealing with the troubles in China' and pointing out 'how they could most satisfactorily be remedied.' So strongly did he feel that this was a work for philosophers to do that he even urged me to write such an article, ignoring the fact that I had never been to China, that I was wholly ignorant of what was happening there and of what events had led up to the troubled situation, and knew nothing of the chief personalities involved. I remember well the urgency of his pleading: 'You *could* if you would; you have been trained in philosophy; you must know

how these troubles could be dealt with philosophically.' Having come late in life to the study of metaphysics, he had conceived a great admiration for large speculations, especially those that were 'idealistic'—in all three senses of that much used word. His faith would have been grotesque had it not been pathetic in its religious earnestness and practical futility. At a Council Meeting at the end of the Institute's third year he complained bitterly to the 'academic members of the Council,' *i.e.*, to those of us who earned our livings by teaching philosophy—which cannot be taught—that we were not doing our duty. After three years, so he felt, the work of the Institute of Philosophy ought to have made an appreciable difference in the public outlook. He was a successful business man and knew, so he told us, how to put a newly-manufactured gadget on the market. He was willing to devise the methods of publicity and bear the expenses incurred in putting across our philosophical wares to the public, but we were regrettably slow in producing those wares.

I assume that no one who reads this article would share the illusions of the public-spirited founder of the British Institute of Philosophy. But the writer of the leader in the *Manchester Guardian*, to whom I have referred, was himself an academic philosopher of some repute and of considerable political experience; he too had been cheered by the inclusion of some Cabinet Ministers and other political notabilities among the members of a philosophical society. Is there any foundation for such hopes as these men had? If not, how are we to answer the questions which, at the beginning of my contribution to this symposium, I suggested were still worth considering?

To me at least it seems clear that no one philosopher, nor any collection of philosophers, has as such any claim to intervene directly in public affairs. By 'as such,' I mean, 'in virtue of his being a philosopher.' In these days it is not necessary to emphasize the complexity of public affairs and the crying need for expert knowledge—experts not of one kind only but of many kinds. Equally is it unnecessary to add yet one more diagnosis of the maladies of our civilization. It is enough to point out that philosophy is not a body of doctrines to be instilled, willy nilly, into the minds of those who 'control the destinies of Europe'—to adopt the language of our more cultured newspapers. We must distinguish between *intervening directly* and *having some slight*

*influence that may*, should circumstances be propitious, *affect to some appreciable degree long-distance policy*. The expression is clumsy but the facts do not permit of neat phrasing. One thing is certain—'whatever fool or blackguard made the world,' it was not a logician or a philosopher with a taste for pigeon-hole phrases. I shall, then, be content to assume that the utmost that can be expected from a philosopher is that, as an outcome of his life's activities, there should be some slight increase in the factors making for tolerable living. His 'life's activities' is the phrase to be noted; I do not refer to the philosopher's professional work, still less to his metaphysical system, should he happen to be so misguided as to produce one. A man's philosophy should (and, if he is properly to be called a 'philosopher' must) inform his life. If it is the business of a philosopher to seek to clarify thought, to find reasons for his beliefs, to be restless and dissatisfied so long as he cannot answer questions which others believe they have answered only because they asked the question confusedly, then he must develop in himself habits of critical and careful thinking that he could hardly discard when he leaves the solitude of his own study. Just exactly that is, in my opinion, the business of the philosopher: critical questioning combined with the resolute conviction that hard intellectual effort can resolve the questions it is worth while to ask.

There should be a row of asterisks here in order to indicate a serious gap which the allotted space does not permit me to fill as I should wish. I descend rapidly to details. A philosopher least of all men should deal in abstractions and generalities. Let us recognize then, that a contemporary English philosopher is a citizen of this country; he has to perform the ordinary duties that can be exacted from him. He ought to perform the duty laid upon him as a citizen of a democracy, namely, the duty of contributing his instructed and informed opinion . . . A difficulty arises in attempting to complete the sentence. *To whom*, and *how*, is his opinion to be contributed? The answer, I believe, depends in part upon what sort of person the philosopher is. His minimum contribution will consist in giving his vote, voicing his opinion in the company of those with whom he discusses political affairs, and vigorously reforming his opinion should new and relevant factors in the situation demand it. Not all philosophers would, I think, be fitted to take a larger part in political affairs, in the ordinary

meaning attached to 'political affairs.' Philosophers as such are not (again, in my opinion) specially qualified for political action or political thinking. Those who are not may, however, still be doing good service for their country and, thus, for mankind.

A philosopher with my outlook demands examples, lest we become lost amidst verbiage—too often mistaken for profound speculations, seeing that obscurity seems profound to those who have assumed enlightenment. An example is to hand. 'The Nazi philosophy,'—'the philosophy of Fascism'—these are now phrases in current use. I believe that the phrases are not ill-chosen. The collection of dogmas, aspirations, and ideals that seem to inspire the leaders of Germany, including *der Fuehrer* himself, do constitute what is roughly described as 'a philosophy of life.' What this amounts to is perhaps sufficiently well known for me to be able to be brief. I call attention to some points only. This philosophy includes certain beliefs about human beings generally and the Germans in particular, certain beliefs concerning the relative unimportance of individual citizens alive to-day as contrasted with the importance of their possible descendants. The acceptance of this philosophy is in large part due to the historical development of the German people. The German people are *as a people* politically young; their political philosophy is philosophically immature. Those of us who have not the misfortune to be Germans can view this philosophy with some measure of detachment and thus recognize its immaturity and see the reasons for the hold it has upon its adherents in Germany. We can see too that direct attack upon this philosophy by denouncing those who teach it or by trying the arts of propaganda upon those who hold it is useless. To pursue this topic would, however, be to go beyond my present theme, for which the Nazi philosophy is but an example, chosen not chiefly because of its urgency but because of our familiarity with it. Anyone who will admit that there is a Nazi philosophy and that *its* influence has an effect upon our lives, through the international situation, must surely recognize the futile untruth of Hegel's famous dictum—'philosophy bakes no bread'. We, in this country, live differently from the way we should be living had, for example, Locke, Rousseau, Bentham and Hegel, not thought as they did. At long-distance how philosophers think matters to (*i.e.*, makes a difference to) the lives of ordinary citizens.



I happen to hold the view that the Nazi philosophy is wholly mistaken. Brevity compels me to be dogmatic. Its positive dogmas have been largely disproved ; its moral ideas belong to an outworn age ; its denial of the value of intellect is self-destructive. The foregoing statements show sufficiently, I hope, an urgent task that confronts philosophers (of a certain sort) in this country now. For example, the phrase ' outworn age ' needs to be examined and justified, or refuted. Naturally I believe that it is justified. The moral ideas of Nazi philosophy need to be stated clearly and examined dispassionately. The positive dogmas must be shown to be dogmas, *i.e.*, unwarrantable assumptions held with the conviction of religious enthusiasts.

There would seem to be two ways of ' justifying ' that, and ' showing ' this. The first would be by piecemeal examination of the philosophy in question. I do not deny that to a qualified set of people and at a moment of great urgency this method might be properly used and with some degree of success. But the success would be a short-term success necessitated by the urgency of a short-term problem. The other way would be by so training citizens as to make them able to criticize not only rival ' philosophies of life ' but also their own ; in short, by helping them to think philosophically. This method requires time and freedom from pressing anxieties.

Reflection upon this point leads me back to the second of the two questions suggested in my first paragraph. Are the claims of politics specially stringent upon philosophers? I hope it is clear from what I have already said that this question does not admit of a simple answer. For, the question seems simple but is not so. I have space here only to break it into two distinct questions. (1) Can philosophers as such make valuable contributions towards the direction of public affairs at a moment of political stress? I believe that the answer is that they cannot. (2) Do the activities of philosophers stand in a closer relation to public affairs than, for example, the activities of a Sanscrit scholar, or of a pure mathematician? To this question the answer, I believe, is yes. Renan once said that the ambiguity of the words ' nation ' and ' nationality ' might well plunge the world in disaster. Perhaps he was meditating on the activities of Bismarck ; however that may be, the present state of Europe adds a footnote to his comment.

We should now add: 'And the word "race."' I should wish to make a further observation. Much of the effect which we refer to as 'mass-behaviour' is due to facile thinking in terms of abstractions. I do not deny that it is convenient to *say* 'Germany insists,' 'England expects,' and so on, but it is dangerous to *think* that England, or Germany, 'insist' or 'expect' as *I*, or *you*, could 'insist' or 'expect.' Not Germany, but *Germans*; then it is sense to ask, 'Which set of Germans?' A philosopher is more likely to avoid the fallacy of thinking in abstractions than are those untrained in philosophical thinking. This is true of 'the philosopher,' that is, of a human being in so far as he is thinking as a philosopher. But 'the philosopher' is also an abstraction about which we must speak with caution.

If it is correct to maintain that how philosophers have thought in the past affects our lives to-day, then, so it seems to me, we cannot desire that philosophers should cease, even at a time of political stress, to devote much of their time and their energy to thinking as philosophers. To-day will also become a past; it matters to those who will live in what is our future that some of our best minds should be now attempting to clarify the principles in accordance with which men's lives could be lived satisfyingly. This adverb is ugly but the past participle or the adjective 'satisfied' would not do. (To suppose that it would do was one of Plato's gravest mistakes). When, if ever, our privately dreamed of Utopia comes into existence life has still to be lived, and in some ways to be lived just as it is now at its sanest and best moments of enjoyment and understanding. It is to this end that political strife, perhaps even war, must be endured. But strife and war do not cease suddenly, coming to an end as a bridge that is exploded leaving a gap that can be bridged again with materials brought from some safe place. Throughout the time of strife philosophical thinking must go on. It will be fortunate if there are a few who are able, at least for comparatively brief periods, to think unattached to their present miseries. Certainly those brief periods would be moments of enjoyment; there is no sin in that, no callous disregard of suffering.

Only a philosopher who takes philosophy, but not himself, seriously, would agree with the above statements. I do not think that a philosophy can be constructed *ad hoc*, although a fashion-

able nostrum may be. Accordingly, I do not believe that a philosopher can properly try to link up his philosophical interests with his political views nor lay down principles for the explicit guidance of politicians. But I believe that his political views will be in part determined by his philosophical outlook ; to the extent to which his philosophy influences other people their political views will also be in part affected. Any form of political society which lays restrictions upon free discussion, which sets up prohibitions and attempts to induce its members to think alike is incompatible with the activities of a philosopher. A philosopher who has the misfortune to be entrapped in such a society has no alternative but to die. In such a society it would not be worth while for any human being to remain alive.

#### R. H. TAWNEY

It is asked whether *Scrutiny*, while remaining predominantly a literary journal, should give part of its space to political articles. The argument that the luxury of letters must be postponed in an emergency to the practical necessities of reconstructing society and organizing peace does not seem to me to hold water. There are moments, no doubt, when it is necessary to fill gaps in a thin line by throwing in the cooks and the orderly-room staffs ; but, whatever may be wrong with politics to-day, it is not a shortage of pen-power devoted to discoursing on them.

*Au-dessus de la mêlée* was a phrase which caused fury, when first coined ; but who can doubt now that we should have done better, while getting on with a necessary and disgusting job, to think twice before dismissing Rolland's words as an outrage? Crisis or no crisis, the world will go on. At a time when most of us find it difficult to keep our heads, it is not less important, but more important, that the permanent values of civilization should be brought to our attention. The question is whether a journal primarily concerned with those values has, in virtue of its concern with them, any special contribution to make to political sanity. If it has, let it make it. If it has not, it had better resist the temptation to darken the atmosphere and add to the din by joining the ranks of the blowers off of steam.

The answer to that question depends, it seems to me, partly

on the meaning given the word 'Politics,' partly on the manner in which it is intended that politics should be treated. There is no reason why a writer whose business is letters should not also speak with authority on some aspect of public affairs. In so far, however, as his knowledge of the latter is an individual *tour de force*—an addition to his principal activity, not an extension of it—a literary journal does not seem a more appropriate place than another to be the vehicle of his views, since it is not his work on literature which has caused him to hold them.

The same statement is not true of the more general conclusions which a man may reach, not through raids into regions remote from his main interest, but as its natural development. In spite of the absurd fetiche-worship surrounding them, what are called 'Subjects' are not independent entities, poised each in majestic isolation on its private peak. If not merely, as has profanely been said, departments of knowledge on which it is practicable to set an examination paper that can be done in three hours, they have often only recently been disentangled from each other. The sciences, in particular, which are concerned with man—consider economics, political science, sociology, anthropology and the various species of history—owe their separate existence to considerations with which practical convenience has had more to do than the articulations of the universe. Their boundaries are fluid and provisional; their frontiers intersect. The debateable land between them is not the least likely region for good sense to be concealed in.

It would be surprising, in such circumstances, if those engaged in one corner of the field had no conclusions to offer those working in another. It would be surprising—so it seems to a layman—if men whose chief concern is literature found nothing worth saying on the question of how to live sensibly together, without violence and cheating. There are, doubtless, many aspects of their work of which he knows nothing; but are these the most important? They learn, it is to be presumed, to know garbage by its smell, and sciolism when they see it. They acquire, one supposes, a habit of discriminating between the genuine article and merely saleable stuff. Since their job, or part of their job, is ideas, they are aware that those alluring wild-fowl are rarely what they seem, but sometimes more and often less, and develop, it may be suspected, a certain tact in stalking them. They can hardly fail

to be impressed by the interaction between the practical arrangements of a society and the quality of its culture, or to be struck by the extreme deviousness of the channels through which the influence of each upon the other makes itself felt. Would they not be more or less than human if the aptitudes acquired and habits formed in the course of their work did not suggest some opinions as to the management of the world about them, and the plans advanced for improving it? If so, can it be argued that such opinions are not worth stating, or that a journal of literature strays outside its province if it gives them an opportunity of being stated in its pages?

Possibly it can. If, however, the opposite view be taken, to what conclusion does it lead?

Not, it seems to me, to the offer of *Scrutiny* as a platform for the exposition of yet another set of water-tight philosophies, or for the discussion of political strategy and tactics, or for the advocacy of particular schemes or revolution or reform—not, in short, to its use as an additional vehicle for propaganda or system-mongering. The air is thick with birds of that feather, and the world deaf with their squawking. Both the function of *Scrutiny* and the work most worth doing are of a different kind. The former is a matter for its Editorial Committee ; the latter, it appears to me, can be pretty simply stated.

The events crowded into the last twenty years have widened horizons, but they have also scattered wits. Their effect on political writing has been that standards of thought and discussion have temporarily gone to pieces. The collapse is most conspicuous among the intelligentsia, part of whose business, it might have been supposed, is to endeavour to maintain them. Specialists, no doubt, at least when addressing-fellow-specialists, are as scrupulous as they were ; but almost anything seems good enough to be offered to the public. Catch-words are palmed off on it as arguments ; deductions from uncriticized assumptions as the rigours of logic ; mere appeals to the emotions, including the meanest, as political sagacity ; solemn absurdities as revelations. With consistency at a discount, and the truth of a case identified with its persuasiveness, nothing, it sometimes seems, is too fantastic to be believed, too dishonest to be proposed, or too atrocious to be contemplated. Anarchy is in the saddle, with clap-trap as its herald.

If the picture appears overdrawn, let the sceptic reflect on contemporary discussions, by men of opposite convictions, not of doubtful subtleties, but of such large issues as democracy, the social system, and international affairs. The nation, it seemed, felt no great astonishment when its leading statesman, after a lifetime of orations on the first, calmly announced that he had decided to conceal from the public the chief plank in his policy, for fear that, if he divulged it, he might lose an election. It is possible for a writer, in discoursing of the second, to refer, with the solemnity of one announcing a discovery, to the part played in it by the fact of social class—as though a premise were a conclusion ; as though Marx had said the last word on the subject, instead of the first ; as though sociology had begun in the forties of last century, and ended in the eighties. It is not only possible, but common, in connection with the third, for actions committed on one side of a frontier to be denounced as criminal by writers who applaud the same actions as virtuous when committed on the other. It is, doubtless, true that what makes the brew turbid is partly the mere mass of new ingredients tumbled into it, and that there are wholesome simples to be rescued from the rubbish. But, with every one stirring the pot, and no one skimming it, it is difficult to see how its contents are to become drinkable.

If such is the condition of political writing, what is needed, in order to improve it, is nothing abstruse or recondite. Its degeneration is partly due to causes of the same kind—competition for publicity, a large market for cheap wares, the belief that, provided that work sells, its quality does not matter—as have caused a similar degeneration in the case of literature. The cure, in so far as there is one, is much the same. It is not a new body of political doctrines, but a new rigour in dealing with all doctrines, whether new or old. It is to judge them by some standard more permanent and exacting than the fashions of the moment ; to distinguish between original and merely imitative work ; to be merciless to the superficial or pretentious, and call humbug by its right name ; to consider theories in relation to the realities of history and psychology ; to ask, if confronted by resounding generalizations as to the sanctity of property, 'property in what?' ; to consider, when the problems of proletarian existence are under discussion, of whom precisely the proletariates of different countries are composed

to-day. It is, in short, to assist authors and speakers to have a conscience in their work, by making them aware that they will meet informed criticism.

The effort to maintain standards by informed criticism, conveyed by pens sharper than a serpent's tooth, has been, I suppose, one of the notes of *Scrutiny*. An outsider cannot say if it is possible or expedient for it to attempt to do for political writing what it has done for literature, without—what would clearly be foolish—injuring its main work by assuming responsibilities which may over-load the boat. It would, in my opinion, be useful if it could.

## LITERARY CRITICISM IN FRANCE (I)

### I. INTRODUCTORY.

‘IT will be our criticism, perhaps, that will most fittingly last longest,’ wrote M. Charles Maurras in a characteristic pronouncement. ‘A Sainte-Beuve and a Renan will have a good chance of making posterity one day forget the Flauberts, the Leconte de Lisles and perhaps even the Hugos.’<sup>1</sup> Frenchmen are sometimes extremely modest about their poets, but they are seldom modest about their critics. They have long regarded themselves as the great critics of the modern world and until lately no one has ventured to challenge their supremacy.

There is of course a good deal of evidence to support the French claims. In France literature is, as it has long been, a *métier* and criticism is regarded as a part of the profession. It seldom occurs to a French critic to preface his first book with an essay explaining and justifying the function of criticism. He would scarcely think of describing his art as ‘a charming parasite’ or as ‘books about books.’ When he does discuss the value of criticism it is usually because he is hard up for a subject for his weekly *chronique* or he does it casually in an aside. Thus Rémy de Gourmont concludes a discussion of the respective functions of novelist and critic by declaring categorically: ‘They must both be creators of Values’ and leaves it at that.

The Frenchman's confidence, which appears so attractive and reassuring when compared with the doubt and uncertainty which beset English critics, has undoubtedly influenced the output of criticism in France. We may have doubts about the greatness of French criticism, but we can have none about its bulk or its seriousness. No one who glances over the shelves of a big library can help being impressed by the number of volumes of criticism by men whose names are household words in Europe or who like Brunetière and Faguet were reputed to be great critics in their day, though we think very differently of them now.

Although the fame of French criticism rests mainly on the work of the distinguished writers of the last century, the origins of the French supremacy must be sought in an earlier age and it is interesting to compare passages from two representative seventeenth-century critics who were exactly contemporary—Sainte-Evremond and Dryden:

' Il est certain que personne n'a mieux entendu la nature que Corneille ; mais il l'a expliquée différemment, selon ses temps différents. Étant jeune, il en exprimait les mouvements ; étant vieux, il nous en découvre les ressorts. Autrefois il donnait tout au sentiment ; il donne plus aujourd'hui à la connaissance ; il ouvre le cœur avec tout son secret ; il le produisait avec tout son trouble . . . <sup>3</sup>

Corneille a cru que ce n'était pas assez de les<sup>3</sup> faire agir ; il est allé au fond de leur âme chercher le principe de leurs actions ; il est descendu dans leur cœur pour y voir former les passions et y découvrir ce qu'il y a de plus caché dans leurs mouvements.'<sup>4</sup>

' If Shakespeare were stripped of all the bombasts in his passions, and dressed in the most vulgar words, we should find the beauties of his thoughts remaining ; if his embroideries were burnt down, there would still be silver in the melting pot. For what remains the excellency of that poet was, as I have said, in the manly passions ; Fletcher's in the softer : Shakespeare writ better between man and man : Fletcher, between man and woman : consequently the one described friendship better ; the other love ; yet Shakespeare taught Fletcher to write love ; and Juliet and Desdemona are originals . . . Shakespeare had an



universal mind, which comprehended all characters and all passions . . . '5

It can be seen that the extracts from Sainte-Evremond are something that we recognize at once as *literary* criticism. The balance and maturity of his writing and the sureness with which he handles the language of criticism make Dryden's criticism of Shakespeare sound like an extract from a respectable essay by a sixth form boy. Dryden's thought is commonplace and, compared with Sainte-Evremond's, his sensibility seems crude.

With these passages in front of us, it can scarcely be denied that the critical intelligence reached maturity far sooner in France than in England. Sainte-Evremond's best work is the product of a society whose sensibility and powers of analysis were already highly developed. Nor must we overlook the work of another writer who was considered the greatest critic of his time. It is a little difficult to understand Boileau's contemporary reputation, but his judgments on French poets of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries have almost all been endorsed by posterity. Although there is a danger of using single passages and isolated examples to prove too much, the fact that the seventeenth century had already made up its mind where the great French writers 'came' points to the existence of an intellectual élite whose criticism had an immense influence on the work of the great writers of the period.

This does not mean that the seventeenth century possessed an abundance of good *written* criticism. The maturity of the French intelligence is more apparent in the moralists of the period than in its literary critics. Indeed, a society which produced the sort of philosophical and psychological analysis that we find in different ways in the *Traité des passions de l'âme*, in the *Caractères* of La Bruyère and the *Maximes* of La Rochefoucauld appears to have possessed in such a high degree the gifts which are necessary for good criticism that we may feel inclined to wonder why the bulk of the written criticism of the period was disappointing, why Boileau is crude in comparison to La Bruyère.

'The history of seventeenth-century society,' replies the historian, 'is a study of imperatives.'<sup>6</sup> It is true that the tendency of the century was to reduce poetry to 'the rules,' conduct to an intricate code and human life to a series of neat formulas; and

though this tendency was partly responsible for the discipline and economy of the great masters, its influence on lesser men was disastrous. It was the first stage in the conflict between natural good taste and subservience to a narrow dogmatism which runs through the whole of modern French criticism and which for all its boasted enlightenment dominates the nineteenth century when the dogmatism of Aristotle was exchanged for the dogmatism of the scientific philosophies.

It is significant that the French Academy began as a series of informal meetings between men who wished to discuss poetry ; but almost at once the State, in the person of Richelieu, stepped in and transformed that informal literary society into an official body. There is no doubt that the Academy corresponded to the needs of the age or that it was from the first a symbol of the natural desire of the Frenchman for an authority which would tell him whether he was ' right ' in admiring a particular author. The symbol was one thing, but the reality was quite another. Once an external authority has been set up it easily turns into the Leviathan which crushes and represses. In the seventeenth century in spite of the disastrous attack on the *Cid*, the intellectual élite succeeded to a great extent in holding the balance between tradition and experiment and curbed the dogmatism of the Academy ; but when the élite had disappeared, dogmatism carried all before it.

The greatness of French literature in the seventeenth century lies partly in the balance between intellect and the senses. The skill with which the intellect analyses emotion without the least distortion gives the literature of the seventeenth century its extraordinary order and clarity. In the next century this correspondence between intellect and senses disappears. On the one hand, we have the impression that the senses are lagging behind the intellect ; there is no growth of sensibility ; feelings become conventional and criticism is full of counters like ' sublime ' which do not correspond to any living reality. On the other hand, we get a literature of revolt against dogmatism which produces the undisciplined growth of feeling that we find in Rousseau.

It is, however, the dogmatic principle which is reflected in eighteenth-century criticism. Its intrinsic value is not great. Whatever his merits as a thinker, Vauvenargues' criticism is decidedly

inferior to Sainte-Evremond's and it is clear from his chapter on Corneille and Racine that he had much less *direct* sensibility than his seventeenth-century predecessor. The interest of Voltaire and La Harpe is mainly historical ; and in spite of his revolutionary social theories, Voltaire appears in his literary criticism as a die-hard conservative. Diderot, it is true, belongs to a different order. Although the problems discussed in the *Paradoxe sur le comédien* no longer seem of immediate importance, the dialogue remains a masterpiece of dialectic and is still worth reading for the author's admirable handling of the language of criticism.

Voltaire and Diderot, however, were the men who marked the beginning of a new phase of French culture. In the eighteenth century the great gifts developed in the France of Louis XIV were turned against the civilization that produced them and were largely responsible for its ruin. The result was that at the beginning of the nineteenth century not only the intellectual élite, but also the sanctions behind seventeenth-century civilization had vanished. The great task of the nineteenth-century critics was therefore to find a philosophy on which to base their criticism, to find a justification not simply for criticism but for art. For though the desire for absolute authority remained, the philosophical basis of that authority seemed to the nineteenth century to have been swept away.

## II. TAINE.<sup>7</sup>

There is an interesting passage in Gourmont's paper on *L'idéalisme*<sup>8</sup> which deserves attention from anyone who wishes to understand nineteenth-century criticism in France :

' L'idéalisme signifie libre et personnel développement de l'individu intellectuel dans la série intellectuelle ; le Symbolisme pourra (et même devra) être considéré par nous comme le libre et personnel développement de l'individu esthétique dans la série esthétique ; et les symboles qu'il imaginera ou qu'il expliquera seront imaginés ou expliqués selon la conception spéciale du monde morphologiquement possible à chaque cerveau symbolisateur.'

The striking thing about this passage is that the critic formulates his standards in terms of a *technical* philosophy. Where Arnold proposes as a test of poetry its 'high seriousness' or

its value as 'a criticism of life.' Gourmont uses terms like '*libre et personnel développement de l'individu intellectuel dans la série intellectuelle*' and '*monde morphologiquement possible à chaque cerveau symbolisateur.*' These differences are not fortuitous; they are not disposed of by saying that Arnold was a product of Liberal Protestantism and Gourmont the product of nineteenth-century scepticism. They are, I think, almost entirely due to the fact that technical philosophy is still part of the normal curriculum in French secondary schools, whereas scarcely any Englishmen study the subject at all.

I make no excuse for underlining this point because the influence of philosophy on nineteenth-century criticism was decisive. French critics were looking for something to replace 'the rules' and, had they but known it, the wisdom of the seventeenth century. It is hardly surprising that they selected one or other of the fashionable philosophical systems of the day. The confidence of the nineteenth century in science was unshakeable. Critics like Taine believed that they had at last found in the scientific philosophies a certain basis for literary judgment which would dispose of the vicissitudes of taste and the caprice of the individual, and the age was rich not only in philosophical, but also in critical systems.

Taine's distinction between 'system' and 'method' in criticism does not appear as important to the English mind as it does to the French, and even in France it has probably lost some of its importance with the passing of time. But the preface to the *Essais de critique et d'histoire* and the Introduction to the *History of English Literature* are of great value in understanding Taine's own approach to literature and French critical method in general during the last century. Taine regarded criticism as a natural history of the human mind, and no one can help noticing the frequency with which he borrows from the vocabulary of natural history and physiology. The Preface deserves to be read in full and there is only room for one quotation here:

'Entre une charmille de Versailles, un raisonnement philosophique et théologique de Malebranche, un précepte de versification chez Boileau, une loi de Colbert sur les hypothèques, un compliment d'anti-chambre à Marly, une sentence de Bossuet sur la royauté de Dieu, la distance semble infinie et infranchissable ;

nulle liaison apparente. Les faits sont si dissemblables qu'au premier aspect on les juge tels qu'ils se présentent, c'est-à-dire insolés et séparés. Mais les *faits communiquent entre eux par les définitions des groupes où ils sont compris*, comme les eaux d'un bassin par les sommets du versant d'où elles découlent. Chacun d'eux est une action de cet homme idéal et général autour duquel se rassemblent toutes les inventions et toutes les particularités de l'époque ; chacun d'eux a pour cause quelque aptitude ou inclination du modèle régnant. Les diverses inclinations ou aptitudes du personnage central s'équilibrent, s'harmonisent, se tempèrent les unes les autres sous quelque penchant ou faculté dominante, parce que c'est le même esprit et le même cœur qui a pensé, prié, imaginé et agi, parce que c'est la même situation générale et le même naturel inné qui ont façonné et régi les œuvres séparées et diverses, parce que c'est le même sceau qui s'est imprimé différemment en différentes matières. Aucune des empreintes ne peut changer sans entraîner le changement des autres, parce que si l'une d'elles change, c'est par le changement du sceau.'<sup>9</sup>

I think that it will be conceded that this passage contains a good deal of sound common sense. Taine's theory of the relation between literature and society was not as obvious in 1866 as it is to-day ; but neither was the danger of his theory. We all know that a knowledge of the contemporary background can help us to understand the literature of a period, that a grasp of the doctrinal differences in the seventeenth century and of the conflict between Jesuit and Jansenist will enable us to appreciate some of the differences between Corneille and Racine ; but we also know that this knowledge can never be a substitute for literary judgment. It is not so much the theoretical side of Taine's system that is open to criticism, but his application of it to concrete cases. Although he insisted on the importance of the individual, he assumed in practice that once we know the *race*, the *moment* and the *milieu*, we can deduce the final term—the writer—from the first three. This approach sometimes prevented him from seeing the individual at all. The subject of most of his literary studies is not an individual writer, but a composite figure—*l'homme idéal et général*—a colourless abstraction deduced from the tendencies of his age in which

the essential characteristics are lacking. This is strikingly illustrated by the study of Racine. Commenting on the line

Dans le fond des forêts votre image me suit

Taine remarks: '*Quand Hippolyte parle des forêts où il vit, entendez les grandes allées de Versailles.*'<sup>10</sup> It seems to me, as I have said in another place, that the force of the line depends on the fact that *fond* suggests infinite extension which has no limit and no term; and by implication it comes to suggest the unexplored depths of the human mind or, as Taine more spectacularly puts it in another place, '*les gouffres où tout peut s'engloutir.*' It is clear that Taine's arbitrary association of 'forests' with Versailles ruins the meaning not only of this one line, but also of one of the greatest scenes in *Phèdre*. His Racine is a seventeenth-century courtier and no more, who would have been incapable of the astonishing analysis of emotion which we find in the plays or the extraordinary power of evocation which makes his poetry unique.

The best way of testing Taine's merits as a critic, however, is to study the paper on Balzac in the *Nouveaux essais*. The first time that we read it, it is difficult not to be impressed. Taine possessed a good sensibility, and the essay is concrete and extremely well documented. The vigour of the writing, the wealth of images and the apparent critical intensity make us feel that here at last is genuine literary criticism. The novelist's style is carefully analysed, its main characteristics are illustrated, praised or blamed as the case demands, and then labelled and put away. But as we get into the essay we become uneasy. Can this really be *literary* criticism, one wonders, or is Taine simply using his author to demonstrate the excellence of his own point of view. When Taine remarks of some of Balzac's characters:

'Les tirades de Mme de Montsauf sont presque aussi désagréables que les concetti de Shakespeare. La comtesse Honorine, qui meurt par excès de pudeur, écrit en mourant la lettre la plus indécente. Mme Claës, au lit de mort, laisse échapper des allusions physiologiques et des axiomes métaphysiques dont heureusement elle était incapable.' (p. 75).

—it is clear that he is not concerned with Balzac's faults *as a writer* or with the *invraisemblance* of his characters; he dislikes

them because their conduct shocks the susceptibilities of a mid-nineteenth-century gentleman whose women friends do not indulge in *axiomes métaphysiques* and who even on their death beds observe the *convenances*. Taine concludes from the behaviour of Balzac's characters that

'La vraie noblesse lui manque, les choses délicates lui échappent, ses mains d'anatomiste souillent les créatures pudiques, il enlaidit la laideur.' (p. 97).

When he writes, in an extremely revealing sentence, of *Eugénie Grandet*

'On a peur ici de la nature humaine ; on sent qu'elle renferme des gouffres où tout peut s'engloutir, tout-à-l'heure la religion, à présent la paternité'

—there is no longer any pretence of applying literary standards at all. The novelist has shown us something that was undreamed of in the philosophy of naturalism and Taine is incapable of dealing with these findings as a literary critic. The only way in which he can account for them is by attributing them to the novelist's ignorance of history:

'D'ailleurs cette amère philosophie manque chez lui de son contre poids, l'histoire, qu'il savait mal ; il oubliait que si l'homme aujourd'hui offre beaucoup de vices et de manières, l'homme autrefois en offrait bien davantage, que l'expérience agrandie a diminué la folie de l'imagination, l'aveuglement de la superstition, la brutalité des mœurs, l'âpreté des souffrances, et que, chaque siècle, on voit s'accroître notre science et notre puissance, notre modération et notre sécurité. Pour philosopher sur l'homme, ce n'est pas assez d'une observation exacte, il faut une observation complète ; et la peinture du présent n'est point vrai sans le souvenir du passé.' (p. 129).

The most curious thing about these passages is the conception of literature which emerges from them. There are many grounds on which Balzac's work can be criticized, but it is noticeable that Taine never at any point asks the question that a literary critic must ask—whether the *Comédie humaine* is, or is not, a valid criticism of the contemporary situation. He either argues that

Balzac's work conflicts with the philosophy of naturalism, or with his own complacent belief that every day and in every way humanity was getting better and better ; or where he can not deny the truth of the findings, he condemns them because they offend his sense of propriety. The underlying assumption is that literature should only interpret life as long as it does not shock or disturb, so that it becomes in the last resort a narcotic.

Taine keeps his parting shot for the last sentence of his essay :

'Avec Shakespeare et Saint-Simon, Balzac est le plus grand magasin de documents que nous ayons sur la nature humaine.'

Although this conclusion is thrown out with an air of playfulness, it is not a *boutade* but a perfectly serious statement of principle which informs the whole of Taine's criticism. In the Introduction to the *History of English Literature* he praises Stendhal because 'he treated feelings as they ought to be treated, that is to say, as a naturalist and a physician, by measuring and classifying them.' Ultimately, literature is valuable not as an experience, but as a document which tells us more clearly than any other how previous generations lived. 'It resembles,' he says, 'those admirable apparatuses with their extraordinary sensitivity which physicians use to detect the intimate and delicate changes which take place in our bodies.'

If Taine's approach had been due merely to the peculiarities of his age, there would be no point in dwelling on it. This curious performance, however, is by no means exceptional ; it is the expression of a habit of mind which can be clearly discerned in a great deal of modern French criticism. Thus we find M. Ramon Fernandez writing in *Messages* :

'L'immense, l'incalculable intérêt de l'œuvre stendhalienne réside moins dans sa valeur intrinsèque que dans les renseignements qu'elle nous livre sur les caractères respectifs de l'autobiographie et le roman, sur les vicissitudes d'un esprit qui, avec un sens admirable des valeurs spécifiques, a su mener jusqu'au bout une œuvre autobiographique et une œuvre romanesque sans jamais perdre de vue leur différence irréductible ni les mêler l'une à l'autre.' (p. 94).

'The immense, the incalculable importance of the gas-cooker,'



you might as well say, 'lies less in its intrinsic value than in the fact that it enables us to distinguish between the respective functions of the saucepan and the frying pan and allows the cook, with his admirable sense of the specific values of the different vitamins, to turn out a suet pudding and a pancake without ever losing sight of their irreducible difference or mixing one with the other.' For it is unfortunately true that French critics are inclined to waste their admirable gifts in attaching futile and often misleading labels, in making petty distinctions between the 'autobiography' and the 'novel' or in trying to measure the number of psychological *aperçus* we get from a great novelist's work, while the true function of criticism is miserably disregarded.

### III. SAINTE-BEUVE.

Sainte-Beuve's reputation as a critic is something of a problem. As long as the supremacy of French criticism was unchallenged, he was fêted as the great European critic. It is hardly surprising that he has suffered severely from changing conceptions of the function of literary criticism. The danger of violent reactions is that they sometimes lead to injustice, and it would be a pity to let Sainte-Beuve's shortcomings as a critic blind us to his genuine achievement as a literary historian and as a propagandist for literature—as the apostle of culture to the new middle classes.

It is a curious fact that Sainte-Beuve's critics are seldom lukewarm. They either regard him like Amiel as 'the prince of French critics' or they deny that he is, properly speaking, a literary critic at all. For those of us who are disposed to take the second view, it is a salutary exercise to read Rémy de Gourmont's paper on 'Sainte-Beuve Créateur de Valeurs' in the first volume of the *Promenades philosophiques* which is probably the ablest defence of Sainte-Beuve that has ever been written. 'The critic like the philosopher,' said Gourmont, 'creates values. The work of art is not a conclusion. Where there is a conclusion there is always criticism.' (p. 33). According to Gourmont, the critic is primarily a judge and his function is to establish literary values, to decide where an author comes and whether we are right in admiring him. Until this is done the work of art remains incomplete. He goes on to say that Sainte-Beuve was responsible for

fixing French literary values from Ronsard to Hugo—that he was, in fact, the person who ‘created’ the ‘value’ of French Renaissance literature, of Port-Royal and Chateaubriand.

This view of Sainte-Beuve’s influence is generally accepted and it would hardly become a foreigner to dispute it. There is, however, another and more general ground on which the validity of Gourmont’s defence can be impugned. Although the ‘placing’ of writers is an important part of the critic’s function, it is not the whole of criticism. From the great critic we expect something more than this.<sup>11</sup>

‘Sound literary judgment,’ wrote Gourmont in the same paper, ‘is not purely intellectual ; feeling plays an important part in it. Now, feeling diminishes with age, or at any rate, the faculty of sympathy cannot be indefinitely extended and the moment comes when new arrivals, even if they still interest us, no longer excite us.’ (p. 38). Sainte-Beuve’s later criticism possesses merits which are not to be found in the earlier, but in the first essays he is much more of the literary critic than he was later on. Some of his best criticism was written between the age of twenty-five and thirty before his ‘method’ had become hardened and dogmatic. The judgment is as sound, the mind freer and the sensibility more lively. His criticism of Racine in the three studies collected in the first volume of the *Portraits littéraires* still merits serious consideration ; it is persuasive and the case is stated with a moderation that was sometimes wanting in the later work. The dissatisfaction that we feel with the essays as a whole lies, I think, in the contrast between the critic’s air of knowing exactly where the writer ‘comes’ and what he ought to say about him, which has contributed so much to Sainte-Beuve’s immense authority, and the comparative poverty of his detailed criticism.

‘Le style de Racine se présente, dès l’abord, sous une teinte assez uniforme d’élégance et de poésie ; rien ne s’y détache particulièrement. Le procédé est d’ordinaire analytique et abstrait ; chaque personnage principal, au lieu de répandre sa passion au dehors en ne faisant qu’un avec elle, regarde le plus souvent cette passion au dedans de lui-même, et la raconte par ses paroles telle qu’il la voit au sein de ce monde intérieur, au sein de ce *moi*, comme disent les philosophes : de là une manière

générale d'exposition et de récit qui suppose toujours dans chaque héros ou chaque héroïne un certain loisir pour s'examiner préalablement ; de là encore un ordre d'images délicates, et un tendre coloris de demi-jour, emprunté à une savante métaphysique du cœur ; mais peu ou point de réalité, et aucun de ces détails qui nous ramènent à l'aspect humain de cette vie. La poésie de Racine élude les détails, les dédaigne, et quand elle voudrait y atteindre, elle semble impuissante à les saisir.' (p. 106).

It is impossible not to be impressed by Sainte-Beuve's smooth accomplishment, by the skill and assurance with which he goes about his work. But the more we study the passage, the more doubtful we become whether it has anything to do with Racine or whether there is any correspondence between the critic's sensibility and the counters which he manipulates with such consummate ease. '*Rien*,' he says, '*ne s'y détache particulièrement.*' Now the aim of the critic is to prevent anything from sticking out too sharply, to 'create' the neat and accomplished craftsman whom Sainte-Beuve's contemporaries called Racine.<sup>12</sup> Thus the whole passage is a verbal construction in which every resource of style is devoted to evoking the genteel, the 'tender' Racine of the nineteenth-century myth. The emphasis therefore falls on the words '*élégance*,' '*abstrait*,' '*loisir*,' '*déliçates*' and '*tendre coloris de demi-jour*.' The '*savante métaphysique du cœur*' (whatever that may be) is a neat way of evading the question of Racine's psychological acumen ; and, as though to make sure that the phrase shall be phrase and no more, Sainte-Beuve goes on to add '*peu ou point de réalité*' ! That the emotions of Racine's characters were the result of artificial contrivance and were not dictated by 'inspiration' was of course a common criticism in the last century. It clearly suited Sainte-Beuve's purpose to assume that the criticism was just instead of testing its truth by a detailed examination of representative passages. The method of nineteenth-century criticism, as we have already seen, was to start from a general conception of an age and to deduce the individual writer from it. It was therefore necessary for Racine to be transformed into a 'courtier' and the discussion of his poetry, instead of being literary criticism in the true sense, is mainly an avoidance of criticism. Sainte-Beuve speaks of his style as though it were a separate entity

and 'elegance' and 'poetry' simply ingredients. He points out, it is true, that the 'elegance' was a product of 'le commerce paisible de cette société où une femme écrivait *La Princesse de Clèves*,' but its true social validity is not discussed. It does not occur to him, for example, that Racine's elegance, like the elegance of the society in which he lived, was a surface elegance which intensifies the ferocity of the passions beneath and the crumbling of the whole social order.

Although Sainte-Beuve criticized Taine shrewdly for trying to discover the writer from a study of his milieu, in many ways the theory formulated in his later work is not unlike Taine's. He, too, believed that criticism should be 'a natural history of minds'; and for Taine's study of the milieu, he substituted a study of the 'literary group.' It was not, he thought, sufficient to study the man; the critic must investigate his family history and 'the first group of friends and contemporaries in which he was living at the moment at which his talent manifested itself, entered into possession of itself and became mature.'<sup>13</sup>

As this theory developed it led the critic almost inevitably further and further from his texts; but it was not without its compensations. Sainte-Beuve's later criticism is less 'literary' than his early work, but it is, perhaps, of more lasting value. Its great value lies in the skill with which he describes backgrounds and tendencies which is more illuminating than anything he wrote about 'style.' It is interesting to compare his discussion of the background of *Polyeucte* in *Port-Royal* with a passage on Corneille's style in the *Portraits littéraires*.<sup>14</sup>

'Le *Polyeucte* de Corneille n'est pas plus beau à tous égards que cette circonstance réelle ("la journée du guichet") produite durant le bas âge du poète, et il n'émane pas d'une inspiration différente. C'est le même combat, c'est le même triomphe; si *Polyeucte* émeut et transporte, c'est que quelque chose de tel était et demeure possible encore à la nature humaine secourue. Je dis plus: si *Polyeucte* a été possible en son temps au génie de Corneille, c'est que quelque chose existait encore à l'entour (que Corneille le sût ou non) qui égalait et reproduisait les mêmes miracles.'<sup>15</sup>

'La touche du poète est rude, sévère et vigoureuse. Je le comparerais volontiers à un statuaire qui, travaillant sur l'argile

pour y exprimer d'héroïques portraits, n'emploie d'autre instrument que le pinceau, et qui, pétrissant ainsi son œuvre, lui donne un suprême caractère de vie avec mille accidents heurtés qui l'accompagnent et l'achèvent ; mais cela est incorrect, cela n'est pas lisse ni *propre*, comme on dit. Il y a peu de peinture et de couleur dans le style de Corneille ; il est chaud plutôt qu'éclatant ; il tourne volontiers à l'abstrait, et l'imagination y cède à la pensée et au raisonnement. Il doit plaire surtout aux hommes d'état, aux géomètres, aux militaires, à ceux qui goûtent les styles de Démosthène, de Pascal et de César.'<sup>16</sup>

The first passage is a penetrating account of the relations between Corneille and contemporary society. It possesses the intuition which is essential to good history no less than to good criticism. But the second passage strikes me as commonplace and unfair. It seems impossible that the situation described in the first passage could have produced the work described in the second ; and if it did, then the relation between Corneille and his milieu must have been different from Sainte-Beuve's description of it. For the description of Corneille's style is little more than a reiteration of the conventional criticisms which are very ably disposed of in the eulogy of *Polyeucte*. The most interesting thing in the passage is the image of the sculptor used to define Corneille's style. Sainte-Beuve's early work is extremely rich in imagery. Now, there is no reason why a critic should not use images provided that they illuminate the work that he is criticizing. The great objection to Sainte-Beuve's imagery is that instead of illuminating his authors, it is at bottom a *substitute* for the critical distinction that one has a right to expect. There is not progress of thought ; one thing is described in terms of another for the purpose of artful denigration. In this respect his use of imagery reminds me of that of a journalist like Hazlitt rather than of a genuine critic like Mrs. Woolf at her best.

The reasons for Sainte-Beuve's failings as a critic are not difficult to discover. 'We judge a work of art,' said Lawrence, 'by its effect on our sincere and vital emotion and nothing else . . . A critic must be able to *feel* the impact of a work of art in all its complexity and all its force.'<sup>17</sup> No one knew better than Sainte-Beuve that a poem is a highly complex phenomenon, but he seldom

managed to grasp it as a whole, seldom makes us feel that his criticism has behind it the whole force of his personality. In his discussion of a poem, there seems to be no continuity between the historian, the critic and the man who remain separate and distinct. It thus happens that though his writings contain interesting observations about language or the 'content' of a work of art<sup>18</sup> he rarely gives us the 'feel' of a poem. His response to his text is in general somewhat faint; and when he does succeed in communicating the impact of a work on his own personality it will be found that the emotion is seldom or never generated by the work alone; it is derived from some personal source that is only indirectly connected with it. In spite of his enthusiasm for scientific method, Sainte-Beuve was much less of a scientist or a philosopher than Taine. There was, indeed, a strange rootlessness—an absence of centre—in Sainte-Beuve as a man; and though this was a serious defect in the critic, it enabled him to experience to the full all the extraordinary spiritual vicissitudes of the first half of the nineteenth century which makes him a figure of capital importance in understanding the atmosphere of his age.

I have lingered over Taine and Sainte-Beuve because they seem to me to be peculiarly representative of French critical method and because it is on their work that the fame of French criticism largely depends. They were both products of the French love of systems, of a completely realized conception of man and his place in the universe; and they were both men who were passionately interested not perhaps in literature, but in culture and ideas. The work of both shows how a love of speculation spoilt that sensibility without which genuine literary criticism is impossible and how a natural love of authority, which may be a virtue, has a peculiarly disabling effect when the wrong authority is chosen. Neither curiosity about life nor mental agility is of much help alone in the education of public taste which is, perhaps, the first task of criticism. They both knew that literature was important, but Sainte-Beuve was unable to tell his public why it was important, and Taine's efforts to do so led him to turn it into a minor branch of history and psychology.

MARTIN TURNELL.

[The concluding part of this essay will appear in *Scrutiny* for December].

<sup>1</sup>*Prologue d'un essai sur la critique*, Paris, 1932, p. 21.

<sup>2</sup>*Œuvres complètes* (Ed. Planhol), Paris, 1927, I. pp. 218-9.

<sup>3</sup>Corneille's characters.

<sup>4</sup>*Op. cit.*, I, p. 194.

<sup>5</sup>Preface to *Troilus and Cressida*, 1679.

<sup>6</sup>Hugon: *Social France in the Seventeenth Century*, London, 1911, p. 17.

<sup>7</sup>I have departed for my own purposes from the strict chronological order of the critics discussed in the three following sections.

<sup>8</sup>Reprinted in *Le chemin de velours*, Paris, 1902, pp. 209-10.

<sup>9</sup>*Essais de critique et d'histoire*, 2nd Ed., 1866, pp. 9-10.

<sup>10</sup>*Nouveaux essais de critique et d'histoire*, 3rd Ed., 1880, p. 188.

<sup>11</sup>It is perhaps the weakness of Gourmont's position that he was obliged to describe Boileau as 'a great creator of values,' though we know that he had a very low opinion of the intrinsic worth of his poetry.

<sup>12</sup>In view of Gourmont's judgment on Sainte-Beuve, the whole passage should be compared with the reference to Racine in the *Problème du style*, pp. 50-1, quoted later in this paper.

<sup>13</sup>For a good summary of Sainte-Beuve's critical position see *Nouveaux lundis*, III, pp. 15-33.

<sup>14</sup>Most of the essays in the first volume of the *Portraits littéraires* were written before *Port-Royal* and collected later. But a footnote makes it clear that they were intended by the critic to be read in conjunction with his later pronouncements and presumably still represented his view of the authors concerned.

<sup>15</sup>*Port-Royal*, II, p. 115.

<sup>16</sup>*Portraits littéraires*, I, p. 48.

<sup>17</sup>*Phoenix*, p. 539. It is only fair to add that the same page contains a remarkable tribute to Sainte-Beuve as a critic! For more favourable estimates of his critical ability see M. André Thérive's Introduction to a volume of selections published in a collection called 'Choisir' (Desclée de Brouwer, 1936) and the review of it in the *Criterion*, July, 1937, pp. 716-721.

<sup>18</sup>Of *Phèdre* he wrote: 'La faiblesse et l'entraînement de notre misérable nature humaine n'ont jamais été plus mis à nu.' (*Port-Royal*, VI, p. 131).

## HARMONY AND COMPOSITION

IT falls to my lot as a reviewer of new books and music for several musical periodicals to see many of the new publications, English and American, which purport to explain to the student the principles of harmony. As these books seem often to have but the remotest connection with music, I have for some time had it in my mind to write a book on harmony which would start from quite different premises. The necessary leisure for this task has not, however, been forthcoming, so I welcome this opportunity for putting my thoughts on this matter in some kind of order.

It is perfectly true that the newer books on harmony approach the subject in a more enlightened manner, that is, the authors see the falsity of doling out rules to be followed unquestioningly by the student. For instance, Sir Edward Bairstow in his book *Counterpoint and Harmony* says:

‘ There has been a tendency in this country to teach counterpoint and harmony in such a way that students became stiff, cramped and unimaginative in their work. They were not encouraged to use their ears and their common sense, but were merely told that certain things were wrong and must be avoided. The view in this book has been adopted that nothing is wrong or right, but that if rules are observed, smoothness will result—no more and no less.’

Again, R. O. Morris in *Figured Harmony at the Keyboard* says:

‘ When I was young, harmony was taught exclusively by means of figured bass. One was given a bass with serried ranks of figures massed in close formation underneath it ; in accordance with these hieroglyphics one put down various dots, dashes and smudges on the staves above, and took the result to one’s teacher. He scanned it rapidly through, drew various parallel lines in blue pencil to show where the consecutive fifths and octaves were, and that was that. No attempt was made to regard the thing from a musical point of view, or to consider whether consecutive fifths have a less noticeable effect in some



positions than in others. The lesson might have been regarded, conceivably, as an exercise in freehand drawing ; it certainly was in no sense an exercise in music.'

And Giard, in his *Fundamental Harmonic Material* (an American treatise) says:

' There exists an irritating tendency on the part of many theorists to state rules of harmony as if they were so obviously true, so axiomatic in character as to require no explanation nor justification. Take for instance the usual custom of warning the student against two parts moving in octaves or unisons. Certainly the sound of consecutive octaves and unisons is not disagreeable, yet the student attempts to avoid them in order to adhere to a rule which makes no appeal whatever to his intelligence. It would be far more reasonable to explain that in four part harmony there are four separate melodic lines, and when two parts move in unison only three separate melodic lines are in evidence.'

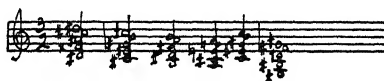
But, however enlightened, the attitude is the same as in the older text-books, and it is this very attitude that I am venturing to criticize.

What is harmony? Certainly not an abstract thing, but something that is the direct outcome of the stuff of sound. This stuff of sound consists, in our European civilization, of twelve equally spaced semitones. We recognize that there are infinite gradations of pitch between each of the static semitones, but as the material of art has to be limited, these gradations have had to be ignored. However far then music seems to flow—and some musical masterpieces seem to flow into eternity—it never really moves away from the influence of those twelve magnetic centres. This release in bondage is one of the prime mysteries of art. Melody is the successive use of any of these twelve sounds, counterpoint is the combination of such melodic structures, and harmony is the result. All this is tacitly recognized in the usual text-books: what is not tacitly recognized is that when the ear became used to hearing counterpoint as fluid chords, those chords tended in time to be detached and thought of as *single sounds*, having the property, as real single sounds have, of combining with others. To try to find the *raison d'être* of modern harmonic methods by analysing down to the

single note constituent is therefore, in many cases, quite false. Take, for instance, this progression, found in many of Vaughan Williams' works:



Is this accurately described as a succession of six-four chords? And is this, from Debussy's *La Cathédrale Engloutie*, to be described as consisting of consecutive dominant sevenths?



Obviously not, yet the ordinary text-book will lead the poor analyst to no other conclusions. Actually, in these two cases we have got back to a single unaccompanied melodic line. In this connection, it must be noted that a single sound is only a convenient name, for actually it consists of numerous sounds caused by sympathetic vibrations. The composers of the examples I have just mentioned are then but extending, complication and subtilizing the accretion of sounds that makes up the so-called single melodic note. Music can only rightly be termed harmonic when the sounds that make up the chords move independently: when, as in the examples given, everything moves in the same direction by the same steps, the music is purely melodic, and I am convinced that the only way of hearing such music is to take in the notes of the chords *en bloc*, in the same way that one would listen to early examples of organum, and not mentally dissect the chords into a number of constituents. In this sense of the use of the word 'harmony' we are led to the unorthodox opinion that this, from Beethoven's E flat Sonata, Op. 7,



is harmonic in a sense which cannot possibly be applied to, say, the fuller and more sonorous phrases found in the 'organ' section of Debussy's *La Cathédrale Engloutie*.

The bearing of all this on the subject of harmony teaching should by now be clearer. If I were to isolate one chord from the succession of chords given in the first two examples from Vaughan Williams and Debussy, I could conceivably analyse them and say 'Ah yes, six-four, resolve five-three,' or: 'dominant seventh, follow by tonic.' But in reality, such statements mean just nothing, for dominant sevenths, six-four chords and so forth have no absolute existence: they are *that or something else* according to what surrounds them. An analogy from another art, that of dancing, may make the point clearer. There has arisen in recent years a school of dancing which calls itself Greek. This dancing is modelled on the postures found in extant friezes, etc. It is an easy enough matter to adopt one of these postures, but as we have no knowledge of how the Greek changed from this posture to another, the so-called Greek dancing of our time is really only Greek posturing. Similarly, the harmonist has isolated harmonies and progressions (postures) from the classics, and the student is asked to move from one to the other by means of rules which have not the slightest universal validity. The results are what we know. The rules isolated from particular practice are valid for that practice and for no other. The harmonist preserves the heart and muscles of music in some kind of spirit and the student is at liberty to observe their anatomy; but he doesn't see the heart beating and the muscles moving. This can only be done when the whole body is functioning. The argument for the usual text-book approach is of course that the student must learn that there is order in music—consequently, his first steps must be ordered, so that later he can use the wings of his imagination. Such an argument *sounds* perfectly logical. There is, however, one serious flaw in it. It is true that music, to be good, must be ordered, but the ordering cannot be imposed upon the substance of music. I therefore fail to see how the discipline of the usual harmony and counterpoint exercise can affect composition except to shackle it to academic standards. We say, in effect, to the student: 'Damp down your imagination for a few years until we have gone through chromatic harmony and fugue.' Or may be the two activities

of harmony and composition are carried on simultaneously, so that what is given with one hand is taken away with the other. The same artificial ordering is apparent in the study of what is known as 'Form in Music.' I have seen enlightened text-books which as preliminary exercises give eight-bar rhythms upon which the student must construct a tune. And Sir Edward Bairstow, in the introduction to the aforementioned book, recommends that 'as soon as students have developed sufficient skill in part-writing, they can carry out this plan in composition by first of all taking as a model a short Minuet or Scherzo by Haydn, Mozart or Beethoven. Only the form should be copied—the length of phrases, the modulations, and above all the rhythmic contrasts and development of themes. The rest—themes, harmony and rhythmic divisions—must be original work.' To what can such discipline lead? Only to endless imitational music, of which the world has more than enough already. Such books ignore the fact that any idea the student may have *contains within itself* its own form and its own harmonic evolution. To impose these from without may make the music conform to, as we deem, respectable standards, but will hardly make it alive and interesting. Rules as we know them through the text-books have not been formulated from the works of any particular composer, Bach, Beethoven, Wagner, Brahms or Palestrina (actually it would be more interesting for the student if he could study a series of text-books each dealing with the harmony and contrapuntal procedures of one of the great composers), but are a sort of composite photograph of general tendencies. This gives them their colourless character. They are a series of abstractions upon which nothing of any value can be built.

What is the alternative? It is agreed that art must be disciplined: how attain that if abstracted rules are not allowed to shape the material? One can understand of course why the vogue of the text-book is so wide—it makes the task of the teacher so much easier. It gives him a foot-rule to measure with, it gives him cut-and-dried formulæ for dealing with any contrapuntal and harmonic situation, it relieves him from the necessity of using the imagination. All he needs is a blue pencil to exorcise those demons—consecutive fifths and octaves. When the student starts his harmony or counterpoint lessons he is usually familiar with much

classical music, *i.e.*, the bases upon which Western music is constructed are already familiar to his ear, if not to his pen. Having this background, any musical idea that comes to him will conform to some particular idiom: his thinking will automatically revolve round Western scales and modes and not round those of other cultures. Bearing in mind this natural conformity of idiom, it should be the business of the teacher, not to force the ideas into greater conformity, but to help any personal traits to evolve unhampered by non-applicable rules. I am, of course, dealing with the claim of the harmony text-book that the training it gives is preparatory to composition. If the student's work shows no personal traits whatsoever, then I agree that a course of harmony training on orthodox lines will do no more and no less harm than a mathematical training, being a juggling with notes instead of with figures, unrelated to a specific and creative end.

Now, to come down to details. Suppose the beginner in harmony or composition were to bring to his teacher an unaccompanied melody. How is the teacher to set about criticizing it? Is he immediately to search for large leaps that take the tune away from a prescribed plane—is he to see that the modulations are right (in the text-book sense)—is he to see that there are not more than three repeated notes? He may, of course, do all of these things, in which case the final result of the so-called 'corrections' will be a colourless tune devoid of all emotional significance. And the student in such a case will, if he knows his classics, be quite justified in protesting that many of Beethoven's themes leap from one plane to another, that Wolfe's songs contain scores of examples of more than three repeated notes in a melody, that Purcell's melodic modulations are anything but orthodox. On the other hand, he may take the more difficult path of criticizing, not from a fixed angle, but from the angle of the tune itself: *i.e.*, whether the tune does what it sets out to do. Supposing this simple tune were brought to a teacher:



If, instead of searching for things which contradict the orthodox ruling, we search for the characteristics of the tune, our criticism will



a student brought me this example of two-part counterpoint



I'm very much afraid I should smile my approval and say 'Get on with it.' But I should not be nearly so pleased with this version, although it is very correct:



One may, of course, retort that my methods won't help the student to pass his Bachelorship and Doctorship in Music. Against this just criticism I have nothing to say, except to ask 'What are we teaching paper work for, if not to help the student's creative ability, however small, to unfold from its own natural bases?' The unnatural bases inculcated by normal methods induce either conformity or revolt, neither of which leads to the greatest art.

The harmonic method I have very briefly outlined is, of course, difficult to incorporate in a text-book, simply because the do's and don't's and 'exceptions to the rule' that fill out the normal text-book would have no place. How then, shall it proceed after the already-mentioned chapters devoted to melodic writing? The next steps will be to two, three and four-part free counterpoint, which, bearing in mind the earlier melodic freedom, will be equally unrestricted as to dissonances, etc., *always provided that the ear of the teacher, widely experienced in different kinds of music, will approve of the logic of the progressions, given certain characteristics in the phraseology of the parts.* At the end of each chapter would be given a list of works that the student should thoroughly soak himself in: masses and motets of Vittoria, Byrd, Morales, Josquin des Prés and Palestrina, madrigals of Monteverde, Vecchi, Gesualdo, Wilbye and Weelkes, the masses of Bach, Beethoven and Vaughan Williams, Bach's Art of Fugue, the fugues of Mozart, and even the fugues in Sorabji's 'Opus Clavicembalisticum.' With perhaps the offer of a prize if he can find, in this mass of counter-

point, more than one general principle: namely, that it is best to move by contrary motion.

By the time the student has had plenty of practice in this kind of four-part free counterpoint he will have become used to a far wider range of harmonic resource than is possible by other methods. Moreover, the equal exercise given to mind and imagination will have fitted him for developing his ideas in a personal way, for such will be but a continuation of his early exercises. I cannot insist too often that composition should be a consistent development from early contrapuntal and harmonic training, and not a free activity as opposed to a restricted one.

The remainder of my book would be analytical—showing how the harmonies arrived at by moving parts became detached and used as expressive and dramatic units. The recitatives in Monteverde's 'Orfeo' would be called upon to show up the falsity of the prevailing rules for harmonic progression. Schubert, Beethoven, Debussy and Vaughan Williams would yield numerous examples of the pliability of the common triad, while Hugo Wolf's songs would show how the augmented triad can be used for expressive ends. The student would thus be given opportunities for seeing how the same material is shaped to quite different ends, for realizing that the history of the art is not one of evolution but of change of emphasis. He must be made aware that he is dealing with pliable material, not something frozen in a mould.

EDMUND RUBBRA.



# A CLASSICAL EDUCATION AND EIGHTEENTH - CENTURY POETRY

THAT the eighteenth century suffered, for one reason or another, from an impoverished poetic sensibility is a fact too familiar to require emphasis. The claim that the minor verse of the century is interesting despite its lack of first-hand experience and intimate response, because it expresses a social order, or preserves the decencies, or anticipates the romantic revival, can only be a plea advanced for lack of a better. Pope and Blake are raised above their fellows by the sheer differentiation of genius ; outside their work it is the dignified expression of sincere commonplaces, of 'images which find a mirror in every mind, and sentiments to which every bosom returns an echo,' which represents the age's best achievement. These qualities are not negligible ; honest observation of men, faithful reflection of their thoughts and habits, call for estimable abilities in a poet, and we rightly admire Gray's *Elegy*, Collins' *Ode to Evening* and a few other pieces, the best of Johnson, Goldsmith and Crabbe, perhaps a little of Churchill. But the absence of anything but a dubious historical interest in nine pages out of ten of Johnson's *Works of the Poets of Great Britain and Ireland* implies a fundamental inner weakness which has long aroused curiosity.

Explanations of course are ready to hand. Mr. Eliot's famous 'dissociation of sensibility' describes what happened ; Mr. Willey's analysis in *The Seventeenth Century Background* of the quarrel between science and poetry gives cogent reasons for the change of intellectual climate. It is true that poetry suffered from a recognition that its materials were apparently of an inferior truth-status ; Granville's *Essay upon Unnatural Flights in Poetry* (1701) shows the effect of this recognition :

'The Poetic World is nothing but Fiction: Parnassus, Pegasus, and the Muses, pure Imagination and Chimaera. But

being however a system universally agreed on, all that shall be contrived or invented upon this Foundation according to Nature shall be reputed as Truth: But what so ever shall diminish from or exceed, the just proportions of Nature, shall be rejected as false, and pass for extravagance, as Dwarfs and Gyants for Monsters.'

That sense of make-believe together with the scientific simplification of language demanded by the Royal Society (and in France deplored in Boileau's famous complaint that Descartes had 'coupé la gorge à la poésie') were without doubt debilitating. Yet sheer clarity of language did not necessarily impoverish—the most interesting uses of words in the century are those of Pope and Swift in whom an extraordinary grasp of clear expression coincides with the most fruitful duplicities, and who demonstrate that, given sufficient psychological tension, even 'easy and significant words' may be as richly charged with meanings as those of a more elaborate vocabulary. It is typical of the century that its language should have most vitality in irony, where the difference between professed and real intention demands an active interplay—Gibbon, for example, is, after Swift, the most remarkable practitioner of such complex allusion, for any representative passage must be read in the context of all his prejudices and attitudes to yield its full effect. But in poetry (again excluding Pope and Blake as being each *sui generis*) the ability to make a 'simple' language achieve any complexity of expressiveness was not only not widely shared, but not even coveted. Critical theory, in the matter of the poetic use of words, seems to have whored after strange gods.

Coleridge pointed to one of them which has hitherto received insufficient attention. In the first chapter of the *Biographia* he wrote as follows:

'In referring various lines in Gray to their original in Shakespeare and Milton, and in the clear perception how completely all the propriety was lost in the transfer, I was, at that early period, led to a conjecture which many years afterwards was recalled to me from the same thought having been stated in conversation, but far more ably, and developed more fully, by Mr. Wordsworth; namely, that this style of poetry, which I have characterised as translations of prose thoughts into poetic

language, had been kept up, if it did not wholly arise from, the custom of writing Latin verses, and the great importance attached to those exercises in our public schools.'

The question therefore arises: did the almost entire preoccupation of eighteenth-century education with the classics seriously affect critical notions of the functions of words in poetry, and help to preserve two principles enunciated by Hobbes and both detrimental to poetry, namely, that the dignity of a poem is lowered if it descends to practical or technical words (*cf.* Johnson's condemnation of those in *Annus Mirabilis*), and that the Judgment, which 'begets the strength and structure' of a poem, is to be preferred to the Fancy which seeks for the 'ornaments'? The further question occurs as to why, if this classical influence was pervasive during the eighteenth century, it should not have been so prominent both earlier and later. This essay in no way claims a single source for such linguistic debility; it simply tries to implement the hint which Coleridge and Wordsworth dropped, and to add this further explanation to those already proffered which concern the influence of the Baconian tradition and the long shadow cast by Milton.

It would be more logical to defer the question as to why classical influence was more prominent in the eighteenth century than at other times until the fact of its prominence had been proved. I prefer, however, to answer it conditionally now, and say that *if* such an influence came unduly to the fore, the explanation lies in a certain defenceless state in which the language found itself. The Holofernes of the Elizabethan age, the pedants satirized in Nashe's *Unfortunate Traveller*, were as doughty Latinists as their Augustan successors, but all the efforts of the Gabriel Harveys could not stem the violent excitements which gave language its vitality through the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods. Many Elizabethans received a classical education, but it was only one—and nothing like the most powerful—of many forces which acted together (*cf.* L. C. Knights's chapter on Elizabethan prose in *Drama and Society in the Age of Jonson*). With the Restoration trend towards a simple order, classical education and classical practice were left to attract critical ideas with far more *proportionate* strength than they had hitherto done. The question of how those influences exerted themselves in the nineteenth century

is a very complex one ; here again they would be only one strand of many, but in the case of *e.g.*, Landor, Tennyson and Arnold, an extremely important one. The reason why in the eighteenth century the classics might be expected to extend their own sort of magnetism widely is therefore the somewhat negative one that other and more violent stimuli were lacking, and that the age required something orderly and controlled.

The fact and nature of that magnetism remain to be explored. Its general effects might be deduced from Dr. Richards' *Practical Criticism* (p. 226) :

' Unless very well taught, Latin verse composition is a bad instrument by which to train a mind in the appreciation of rhythm. A few very brilliant or very rebellious boys escape, but the rest receive the impression (often indelible) that good verses are simply those which fit a certain framework of rules, and that this framework is the measure of their rhythmical virtue. Applied to English verse the notion meets with a check in the fact that no set of rules has been found (or at least agreed upon), but the efforts of the rival schools of prosodists seem all directed towards establishing some set of rules, and the general impression that metrical excellence lies in regularity is encouraged.'

We remember Johnson's complaint that the Metaphysical poets very often wrote ' such verses as stood the trial of the finger better than the ear ; for the modulation was so imperfect, that they were only found to be verses by counting the syllables.' A second general indication may be derived from Coleridge's phrase, the ' translation of prose thoughts into poetic language,' with its corollary that fine feathers make fine birds. Criticism, said Erasmus Darwin, looked upon the Muses as young ladies, and expected to see them dressed. Johnson therefore praises *Comus* as follows :

' a work more truly poetical is rarely found ; allusions, images, and descriptive epithets embellish every period with lavish decoration.'

(This recalls the man who said that his house was complete except for the architecture). And a third general indication is to be found in the desire to invest subjects with a spurious dignity ; Hobbes objects to ' the names of Instruments and Tools of Artificers, and

words of Art,' Milton is guilty of an absurd inflation when he describes the way to strike fire from flint (P.L. X, 1070-1073), and Grainger, willing to mention but afraid to name so plebeian a beverage as rum, is commended by Johnson for his artful periphrases.

It is likely that the foundations of these practices were laid at school, and that they were reinforced by the upper-class guardianship of culture which in many ways bore such excellent fruits. The school-books of the time do not differ much from those of an earlier or later generation (educational practice remained approximately stable) but they provide a starting-point for the consideration of neoclassic language-habits. Charles Hoole's *New Discovery of an Old Art* (1660) is typical; boys are to draw sentences from their phrase-books, and then

'are to be instructed in what order to dispose them, and what Formulas they are to use in passing from one to another . . . not tying them to the words of any one author, but giving them liberty to contract or enlarge them ; so that they still contend to go beyond them in purity of expression.'

Elegance of phrase and 'purity of expression' were primary considerations ; so also was logic of construction. Robinson's *Phrase Book for Winchester School* (1658) gives a representative treatment of the theme *Festina lente*, with examples—too long to quote—of the proper management of the seven parts of the fixed model, Propositio, Ratio, Confirmatio, Similitudo, Exemplum, Vetus Testimonium, and Conclusio. Inspiration is to be disciplined until it becomes logical, purposive, controlled, mechanical. Pope's *Receipt to Make an Epic Poem* merely burlesques an adult version of this process. Eachard had already been witty at the results (*Grounds for Contempt of the Clergy*, 1670): when an 'Academic youngster' is 'put upon a Latin oration,' he writes,

'away he goes presently to his magazine of collected phrases ; he picks out all the Glitterings he can find : he hales in all Proverbs, Flowers, Poetical snaps, Tales out of the Dictionary, or else ready latin'd to his hand,' then 'he falls presently into the most lamentable complaint of his insufficiency and tenuity ; That he, poor thing, hath no acquaintance with above a Muse and a

half ; and that he hath never drunk above six-q. of Helicon, and you have put him here upon such a task, (perhaps the business is only, which is the nobler creature, a Flea or a Louse) that would much better fit some old soker at Parnassus than his sipping inexperienced Bibbership . . . Then he tickles over a little the skirts of the business ; By and by, for a Similitude from the Sun or Moon ; or if they be not at leisure, from the grey-ey'd Morn, a shady Grove, or a purling Stream . . . and so fearing he should break the thread of your patience, he concludes.'

Against this background we may consider the position of eighteenth-century poetry.

The minor men—and the major ones too, at times—were in a situation which looked advantageous but wasn't. Their education had begun with academic school exercises ; it had continued with a close study of, and in most cases a deep affection for, the classics ; Milton was coming into his full fame ; there was a persistent concern for the improvement of the language. The inspiration of nearly every critical effort of neo-classicism was, says Spingarn, ' the attempt to discover the secret of the greatness of the classics, and the means by which modern literature could profit by this age-long search.' But these factors, admirable in themselves, combined unfortunately to obscure the real vitality of the English language. Milton, it is clear, was a bad choice as a model. ' By writing in a foreign tongue,' says Dr. Tillyard of the *Defensio Secunda*, ' Milton has of necessity sacrificed the homeliness and freshness that enlivened the style of his English prose. We are remote from the language of everyday speech and frankly in the realm of rhetoric.' The observation applies, of course, to much of Milton's English poetry as well as his Latin prose ; again and again he hesitated between Latin and English as his poetic medium, trying to estimate which language would ensure the most lasting acceptance of his poetry and best fit the formal gestures required of the grand manner. The deductions from this indecision have, indeed, been drawn often enough. The resulting compromise, with its profound success in a small range of moods and effects, and its complete failure in most others, exerted a fatal fascination over his imitators. They had, too, to overcome Latin influences at first as well as second-hand. Their school-days had taught them the importance of

Judgment (in the general design of their compositions) and Fancy (in the search of decorative dressings—*cf.* Hobbes); they had taught a generous use of periphrasis, a skilful handling of verbal structure ('the turn' etc.) and a sense of design which kept the formal argumentative-demonstrative order of prose exposition, but heaped on whatever embellishments the subject could bear. When the cultured gentleman sat down to write Latin verse he was likely, not being able to reach the height of a Milton or Cowley, to turn out a rhetorical exercise, a mock-heroic burlesque, or a seriously ponderous treatment of a commonplace.

The main points of significance in the work of Restoration and Augustan Latin-versifiers are worth detailing since they are closely reflected in the practice of English poetry of the same time. They are the formal manner, a sense of virtuosity and only partly-concealed strain, and a general reliance on theatrical visual images and similes, deriving perhaps from a conventionally limited notion of imagery, which are easy to 'build into' the course of the verse. (We may compare the way in which the 'Homeric' similes of *Sohrab and Rustum* tend to be separate decorations and might as well be insertions into the poem; or, for an eighteenth-century example, the way Gray's *Odes* tend to fall apart into a series of theatrical pictorial fragments). Beside this, there is a sense of structure, formal, external, and calculated, as though a poem were compounded of solid slabs. (In English poetry, compare the over-obvious architectonics—'Here . . . there . . . ' 'Behold . . . behold . . . ', 'Methinks I see . . . methinks I hear . . . '—which occur whenever an eighteenth-century poet indulges in vaticination. One might instance Tickell's *Ode on the Death of Mr. Addison*, which with all its dignity, good taste, and subdued poignancy never coalesces into a poem as distinct from an accomplished tribute in verse put together from separate units which do not interact or animate each other).

Addison was probably the most successful Augustan practitioner of Latin verse. Well-turned odes on official occasions or on the scientific inventions of the day, elegant burlesques and mock-epics, were his stock-in-trade, and the *Musarum Anglicanarum Analecta* which he edited garnered scores of poems on similar subjects by his brother authors. Surveying the ceremonial odes contained in these volumes we notice the strain of an assumed

and 'official' excitement, hyperbolical raptures and eulogy, an addiction to grandiose composition, virtuosity in periphrasis, and an artificial sense of structure. It is clear where Addison's own *Campaign* and *Letter from Italy* learnt their repetitive parallelisms, exaggerated ceremonial, stiff construction, and florid gestures. The extravagance is worlds removed from that of the metaphysical tradition where, even in the brilliant perversions of a Cleveland, the inspirational processes could not possibly be called crude. Both in Latin and English, such ceremonial verse, insisting on its dignity, limited the activities expected of poetry until a formal solemnity was left too often to take the place of sincerity.

At the risk of seeming more pedantic than necessary I must briefly outline two of Addison's poems. The first is the *Barometri Descriptio*, which opens by describing the miner's discovery of mercury in the bowels of the earth, and continues with the insertion of the liquid into a long tube and its consequent forecasting of the weather. The poem is carefully controlled; it proceeds with a decorous gait, courteously bowing now on this side, now on that. It is agreeably diversified. Pope's words in the *Essay on Pastoral* might be adopted to describe it:

'this variety is obtained in a great degree by frequent comparisons, drawn from the most agreeable objects of the country; by frequent interrogations to things inanimate: by beautiful digressions, but these short: sometimes by insisting a little on circumstances; and lastly by elegant turns on the words, which render the numbers extremely sweet and pleasing.'

(The aptness with which this fits not only the *Pastorals* but neo-classic Latin verse suggests the affinity of spirit between Augustan Latin and English poetry). The metal is discovered and described, the barometer is made and its qualities detailed, with glimpses of the weather which accompanies its changes and the consequent effects on country life. Though the poem provides a formal pleasure, it relies entirely on commonplaces: it is not, and cannot be, a record of fresh experience. The careful canvassing of a set subject, the successful but conventional descriptions of natural scenes, the details of storm and sunshine, are emotionally and intellectually elementary: the structure is premeditated and its units lie amicably but not intimately side by side. In English verse, Thomson's



*Seasons* derive from a similar conception of poetry. His descriptions even at their best suggest the prospectus—the poetic personality revealed is laborious and unsubtle. The poem proceeds by collection and development of visual impressions, and demonstrates that a mere *desire* to describe, and certain ability to do so, are doing duty for a compelling imaginative motive. The description of bird-songs in spring (*Oxford Book of Eighteenth-Century Verse*, p. 240) amasses its details as though a compendium of all the birds which ever sing is necessary for readers who are not used to hearing them sing at all. The descriptive units of which such poems (Latin or English) are composed spring from no imaginative necessity, and the accusation that the century generally lacked a lyric gift arises from the fact that poetic composition took place in the more superficial levels of the mind. Where there is an effect of unity and of personal emotion (Gray's *Elegy*, Johnson's *On the Death of Mr. Robert Levet*) it proceeds from the sincere sententiousness and uniform tone to which the better poets of the time could rise.

The other of Addison's poems which needs a word of mention is his mock-epic of the war between the pygmies and the cranes (*Proelium inter Pigmaeos et Grues Commissum*)—a typical heroic burlesque of the rivalry between the two empires, the battle led by valiant leaders (*cf.* the 'magnanimosque duces' of the bees in the fourth *Georgic*), and the eventual extermination of the pygmies whose spirits now inhabit the vales of Elysium and return as tiny ghosts at night to haunt the green banks of their former country. The original has neatness, gaiety and skill, qualities not to be despised, but it is, of course, no more than an elegant amusement. The lines from Tickell's *Kensington Gardens* which are printed in the *Oxford Book of Eighteenth-Century Verse* under the heading of *Fairies*, are a very close parallel in tone and manner; graceful, amusing, delicately turned, they call for a response only from a very limited number of faculties, and the greater part of the response might be summed up as an admiration for graceful artifice. Tickell's *Fairies* is Addison's *Proelium* in miniature; as the Latin mock-heroic poem was a medium for the scholar-poet to show his abilities, a kindred tone of elegant banter suited the polite mode of English poetry. Sheer genius might raise the level to that of *The Rape of the Lock*; otherwise the appeal remained on the plane of the polished and innocuous. The limited demands which on the whole

the century made of poetry raised elegance, order, solemnity, and playful wit to pre-eminence—and they were the qualities which a cultivation of the classics would most naturally develop. For this among other reasons the century's greatest achievement lies in prose rather than poetry.

Elegance or elevation demanded the abandonment of the full resources of poetic language. 'There was before the time of Dryden,' says Johnson,

'no poetical diction, no system of words at once refined from the grossness of domestic use, and free from the harshness of terms appropriated to the particular arts . . . Those happy combinations of words which distinguish poetry from prose (*cf.* Coleridge's "translation of prose thoughts into poetic language") had been rarely attempted; we had few elegances or flowers of speech.'

The impoverishment is obvious; Coleridge pointed it out in comparing (*Biographia*, chapter I) the passage from *The Merchant of Venice*, II, 6, beginning

How like a younker or a prodigal  
The scarfed bark puts from her native bay

with that from Gray's *Bard*, beginning

Fair laughs the Morn, and soft the Zephyr blows,  
While proudly riding o'er the azure realm  
In gallant trim the gilded Vessel goes,  
Youth on the prow, and Pleasure at the helm—

where the intense vitality of the first contrasts with the solemnly moralized and generalized inflation of the second.

No single cause explains this impoverishment. The passion for imitation was partly responsible; the *Georgics* were repeatedly ransacked, Spenser, Milton, and Pope were an incongruous presiding trinity. But behind the immediate models there lay more general assumptions about the 'poetic,' about the kind of elevation required. Wordsworth, of course, recorded that he had been

Misled in estimating words, not only  
By common inexperience of youth,

But by the trade in classic niceties,  
 The dangerous craft of culling term and phrase  
 From languages that want the living voice  
 To carry meaning to the natural heart.

'Moderation' was preferred to the intimate revelation of passionate feeling; Robert Lloyd praised Milton as 'more correctly wild.' Wildness was, as it were, indispensable, according to ancient theories of poetic vaticination, but it must be civilized—*ut cum ratione insanias*.

And secondly, a serious insensitiveness to the complex life of words followed from the attitude which viewed them from the 'outside,' from the superficial notions represented by Dryden's dictum that the words are

'the colouring of the work, which, in the order of nature, is last to be considered. The design, the disposition, the manners, and the thoughts are all before it.'

It is relevant to refer to Bridges' distress at Hopkins' 'Oddity and Obscurity' and the implications of his comments on Hopkins'

'faults of taste, which few as they numerically are yet affect my liking and more repel my sympathy than do all the rude shocks of his purely artistic wantonness.'

Cf. too as particularly relevant to the eighteenth century the following from *How to Teach Reading*, p. 44:

'The "classic" . . . is trained to regard literature as a matter of manipulating language according to rule and precedent—language divorced from experience. The resulting "taste," "judgment" and "sense of fitness" (usually so strong in the "classic") are almost insuperable bars to the development of critical sensibility.'

The bars, at any rate, are difficult to surmount without the realization that there are more organic things than 'taste,' etc., to be looked for; in a century when such inadequate criteria were accepted without question it needed the radical originality of Coleridge to suggest a more fruitful approach to language. This is not to deny that superb results can follow when such criteria are used with the independence of a Dryden or Johnson.

The results of the general insensitiveness may be examined in Gray's *Odes*. They were indeed at first unpopular, yet the trend of linguistic development makes them natural products of their age. It is impossible to accept, say, the *Ode on the Spring* seriously. It has a baroque charm; its warmth of colour, decorative personifications, and playful solemnity give it individuality, though hardly perhaps of a different sort than if it were a scene painted on an opulent ceiling. The 'rosy-bosom'd Hours' borrowed from the Spirit's last speech in *Comus* emphasize the gap between Milton's genuine sensuousness and Gray's floridity. The opening lines display a perfunctory wonder; the 'long-expecting' flowers (how elementary an epithet) are 'disclosed'—the histrionic gesture. It is pedantry 'to wake the purple year' in *English* poetry. The classical pretence in imagery, mythology, and vocabulary is a fundamental weakness; the immediate lapse into conventional moralizing is only partly redeemed by the bantering tone ('At ease reclin'd in rustic state'). The anthropomorphic banality of the 'insect-youth' who suggest the transience of man gains nothing from one's recollection of the fourth *Georgic* (cf. the 'emissa iuventus') since the effect is merely one of clumsy triviality. (By a pardonable association, the mind turns to Carroll's little oysters). 'Float amid the liquid noon' is an admitted borrowing from Virgil ('nare per aestatem liquidam'): the following line ('Some lightly o'er the current skim') in all probability derives from the same source ('flumina libant summa leves'), and the next two come admittedly from Milton. In each case the borrowing is pedantic and clumsy. The poem lapses, symptomatically, into ballad rhythms which almost parody the banal moralizing, and the final subsidence into playfulness, after several disconcerting hesitations of tone, suggests its origin in a mere indecisive 'desire to write an ode.' Even in the phrases which escape the general insensitiveness (e.g., 'the busy murmur glows') the debt is normally to a Latin original (cf. 'fervet opus,' *Georgic*, IV, 169) rather than to personal observation. This inbred literary manner characterizes all the odes, and too often joins with the histrionic emptiness so pronounced in *The Bard*—which might be characterized as an exercise in the art of formal gesture. We think of the portraits whose subjects lean on urns and flourish a carefully-posed hand to express a premeditated mood—

On a rock whose haughty brow  
 Frowns o'er old Conway's foaming flood,  
 Rob'd in the sable garb of woe,  
 With haggard eyes the Poet stood ;  
 (Loose his beard, and hoary hair  
 Stream'd like a meteor to the troubl'd air),  
 And with a Master's hand, and Prophet's fire,  
 Struck the deep sorrows of his lyre.

(As unconscious parody, there is the passage from *Reflections upon Theatrical Expression* quoted in F. C. Green's *Minuet*:

' In *Astonishment* and *Surprise* arising from *Terror* the *left leg* is drawn back to some distance from the other: under the same Affection of the Mind, but resulting from an *unhop'd-for Meeting* with a beloved Object, the *right leg* is advanced to some distance before the left.' And so on).

The *Odes*, it is sufficient to say, are literary through and through, and the debt is to a language which has dulled Gray's feelings for the resources of his own tongue—despite the perspicacious comments on Elizabethan and Augustan language in the letter to West in 1742. It is of course impossible to apportion the blame in exact degrees between too great an attention to Latin originals and the faults of a scheme of education ; but one easily agrees with Wordsworth that Gray ' was at the head of those who, by their reasonings, have attempted to widen the space of separation betwixt Prose and Metrical Composition, and was more than any other man curiously elaborate in the structure of his own poetic diction.' *Curiously elaborate* . . . The anthropomorphism of the *Georgics* is in the genuine Latin manner—mature, unaffected, simply and dramatically descriptive: that of English imitations (and translations—Dryden's version of the Fourth, for example) is stilted, artificial, explicit, and melodramatic. The contrast again between the complex vitality of movement, metaphor, and emotional detail in the honey-bees passage of *Henry V* (Act I, Scene 2) and the superficial, pompously-playful anthropomorphism of the *Ode on the Spring* is significant, not only of the different powers of the respective poets, but of the devitalization which followed too close an adherence to Latin models and practice. ' Easy poetry is universally admired,'

said Johnson, in No. 77 of *The Rambler*, referring principally to technical facility: that the emphasis should have been laid in this way is a sign of the flaccidity produced by the pursuit of good form.

Attention to mediocrity is justified only if it suggests why the object of scrutiny was mediocre. Though Johnson pleaded for the 'modern writers of Latin poetry' as 'a class . . . too generally neglected,' no one is likely to profit much from perusing their compositions. As a contributory cause of a general debility they may, however, be worth the attention of this essay; they suggest one explanation of a historic fact, and they offer a caution—that an educational system unconcerned with a full appreciation of English poetry, or engrossed by a desire for gentility in the literary product, is producing attitudes which largely disable for the judgment of English literature. In the case of the eighteenth century, as at any period, linguistic possibilities were controlled by a complex tissue of forces; but it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that when, for the reasons suggested by Mr. Eliot and Mr. Willey and others, the writers of the late seventeenth century (well aware of a crucial change in the air) decided that the language needed retrenchment and reform, they left it peculiarly open to the influences of a classical training—for good and for bad; more so, at any rate, than it had been earlier, when the trend towards conformity competed weakly with a high degree of individualism, and more so than it was to be later, when the guardianship of letters passed away from a cultured upper-class. The abandonment in the late seventeenth century of linguistic exuberance in favour of a classically-controlled and disciplined simplicity made language poorer from the point of view of poetry. Tickell's words on Addison sum up the case well:

'An early acquaintance with the classics is what may be called the good-breeding of poetry, as it gives a certain gracefulness which never forsakes a mind that contracted it in youth . . . If Mr. Addison's example and precepts be the occasion that there now begins to be a great demand for correctness, we may justly attribute it to his being first fashioned by the ancient models, and familiarized to propriety of thought and chastity of style.'

To be 'correct with spirit, eloquent with ease' was not an unworthy, but merely an inadequate, ideal. The attack which Wordsworth and Coleridge were to make on this impoverished gentility was radical enough, but even so it did not enable the linguistic habits of nineteenth-century poetry to link themselves with those of the pre-Restoration period. Such matters demand more examination than it is possible to give them here ; as far as the eighteenth century goes, a single essay must content itself with suggesting that there is a persistent likeness between the current assumptions about English poetry and the standards inculcated by attention to the classics, and that the demands for metrical excellence, allusive periphrasis, correctness, elegance, 'embellishments,' judgment, and 'easy and significant words' applied as it were from the outside are largely the responsibility of the classic creed.

A. R. HUMPHREYS.

# COMMENTS AND REVIEWS

## *THE AMERICAN CULTURAL SCENE.*

The third article in Mr. H. B. Parkes' series, *The American Cultural Scene*, will appear in the next number of *Scrutiny*, that for December.

## *THE SPENS REPORT.*

The Editors hope to publish in the December number a review of the *Report of the Consultative Committee on Secondary Education*, drawing on a number of commentaries which they have received on the Report.

## *THE FUNCTION OF THE UNIVERSITY.*

The University of Oxford has conferred an honorary doctorate upon Mr. P. G. Wodehouse. Similar honours were at the same time conferred upon Sir Edmund Chambers and Sir Herbert Grierson. Sir Edmund Chambers and Sir Herbert Grierson are very distinguished scholars. Mr. Wodehouse is—well, according to Mr. Belloc he is 'the best writer of English now living' (see the introduction to the *Week-End Wodehouse*). English masters and mistresses will no doubt have noted that the standard has been endorsed by the highest academic authority.

Mr. Wodehouse is also, of course, a large-scale producer of humorous fiction for the magazines, which sells fabulously in book form, and no one grudges him that kind of success. But those high-brows who (being challenged to read and approve) find the quality of the product no higher than the circumstances of production and publication would lead one to expect must feel that Mr. Wodehouse's new triumph is something of a date in cultural history. Would anything of the kind have been possible even fifteen years ago? There may, of course, be an excessive lack of sympathy in the view that his humour is a cross of Prep-school and *Punch*, his invention puerile, the brightness of his style the inane, mechanical and monotonous brightness of the worst schoolboy slang (the whole point of which, in so far as it has any, lies in its shamefaced



rejection of the standards of maturity—Mr. Wodehouse's humour, according to the view in question, works within the ethos of that slang: there is no criticism from outside). But Mr. Wodehouse is certainly incomparably less of an artist than the late W. W. Jacobs, whom no university would have considered honouring. Dons to-day, however, are not highbrows.

Miss Dorothy L. Sayers is also widely thought in universities to write well. Admirers of hers in the world at large are now wondering whether the well-known constitutional anti-feminism of Cambridge means that Cambridge has no chance of catching up with Oxford.

F.R.L.

## THE END OF THE 'MODERN MOVEMENT'

*WYNDHAM LEWIS THE ARTIST, From 'Blast' to Burlington House (Laidlaw and Laidlaw, 15/-).*

*ART LIES BLEEDING, by Francis Watson (Chatto and Windus, 7/6).*

It is only fitting that the most redoubtable personality in English Art should now write the concluding chapters to an epoch which is rapidly drawing to a close. An extraordinary epoch it has been, too, that began with high hopes and such a genuine revolutionary impulse, and has fizzled out in a peculiarly unimpressive splutter. For, one may as well face up to it, 'The Modern Movement in Art,' in all of its manifestations, is no longer very modern and has ceased to be a movement in any real sense. 'What has already happened,' thus Wyndham Lewis, '—that can be said at once—is that modern art of the highly experimental sort, advocated in these essays and manifestos (*Blast*, *The Tyro*, etc.), is at an end.' There is, needless to say, still a certain amount of twittering in the revolutionary dovecotes, the rear-guard struggling bravely to the fore still cuts a caper or two to prove it was there when the fight was on. In the back waters of Mayfair the little 'advanced' galleries continue to stage shows of cubists, expressionists, surrealists, of Abstract and Constructivist art, or resuscitate the

'isms' of the day before yesterday. But a forlorn atmosphere, a sense of unreality, informs them all ; it is obvious one is assisting at a parade of ghosts.

In London that was only to be expected. 'As things peter out on the continent, they come over here on tour ; that is the rule.' We are always a little slow on the uptake where the visual arts are concerned, one must allow for the regulation British time-lag, which, incidentally, seems to be operating in other departments of life as well nowadays. In Hampstead it is considered terribly 'modern' to imitate a Picasso style of a decade or so ago, and occasionally canvasses still change hands at fairly attractive prices. But that doesn't mean anything. Such collectors as still frequent the galleries for the purpose of buying pictures instead of merely hobnobbing with Bohemia, are of a peculiar breed, the sort of people who commission the most hair-raising surrealist to paint altar pieces for the village church near the country seat where they and their friends repair for the week-end cocktail party. Otherwise there is very little doing and the market is slumping badly. And if anyone is curious to know how the business is still carried on, he can read it in Mr. Francis Watson's well-documented book, which gives you all the tit-bits complete with chapter and verse. The upshot of it all is that the breach between the artist and his public is immense and apparently unbridgeable. In spite of its popularization and exploitation by the poster world and in certain spheres of industry, there is not the slightest doubt that 'modern' art, more specifically, the revolution in the Arts that began round about the turn of the century, is to-day as dead as the proverbial dodo.

In that revolution Wyndham Lewis played a conspicuous, indeed, a leading role. In fact he is the only native born artist who originated a movement on this side of the channel and became a chef d'école *at the same time* that things were happening in Paris. And although Vorticism, trumpeted by its organ *Blast*, had only a short innings and was cut short by the Great War, Mr. Lewis has nevertheless kept his finger on the pulse of the times ever since.

In the book under review Mr. Lewis has collected all his more important writings on Art and has added a long introductory essay in which the whole period is reviewed, the present situation summed up

and a possible line of attack for the future indicated. Contrary to those now 'reactionary' artists who blithely go on cubing, surrealizing and abstracting, Mr. Lewis advocates a return to Nature. In true 'enemy' fashion he plumbs for what he calls *super-naturalism*, that is, for precipitating himself on the mystery called 'nature,' and while 'burying Euclid deep in the living flesh,' never to remain unconscious 'of those underlying conceptual truths that are inherent in all appearances.' It is the only method, Mr. Lewis contends, whereby the artist stands a chance of regaining his public, of becoming 'popular' once more. The various phases of Mr. Lewis' art, from Vorticist to Burlington House (*i.e.*, the famous portrait of T. S. Eliot rejected by the Royal Academy) are well illustrated by reproductions, which include, among other things, the remarkable 'Inferno' exhibited at the Leicester Galleries a year ago.

What, then, has happened? To this question no simple answer is possible, but obviously the situation in the Arts cannot be divorced from the general cultural and social problem in Europe. In previous articles in this journal I have already discussed certain aspects of this problem in so far as it has a bearing on the Arts, so that it is unnecessary to go over the same ground again. But for all practical purposes, it may be said that the reason Art has reached a sort of dead end, and, what is equally serious, that the genuine artist has in a manner of speaking been betrayed, may be attributed directly to the excesses of Surrealism and the Abstract cult. Surrealism in particular has given Art the *coup-de-grace*. After the tedious antics of M. Breton and his travelling circus the already bemused public can hardly be blamed for feeling that it has been fooled once too often. Still, they are marvellous publicity men, these surrealists, the ordinary man at least can appreciate that, and O Boy! what business they have brought to such firms as Schiaparelli, not to mention the New York World Fair, where that skilful if rather academic painter Salvador Dali has an exhibit all to himself, full of live Venuses under water, bandaged cows, upside-down umbrellas, phallic symbols and, of course, the obligatory protruding viscera! It is all very amusing, no doubt, but for anyone who still retains a serious interest in the Arts it is sad to reflect that this is the end of it all, a few earnest but second-rate people abstracting themselves practically

speaking from life altogether, and a whole troupe of clowns exploiting their infantilisms in public to the applause of eager debutantes and the somewhat faded smart set generally.

It is with a sense of relief, therefore, that one salutes Wyndham Lewis' book, surely one of the most important publications of its kind to appear since the war. To read Mr. Lewis' vigorous and incisive writings, some of them, like the 'Notes and Vortices' from *Blast*, penned more than a quarter of a century ago, after listening to the feeble tittle-tattle of the salons and the studios (where of course the ingenuous Professor Read is always ready at a moment's notice to fit out the latest *ism* with a brand-new portentous philosophy) is an exceedingly refreshing experience. It is not surprising that in 1914 he was going a bit too fast even for the professionals, and to-day, clearly, he is again a long way ahead of our ultra-modern vanguard. In *The Caliph's Design* (1922) he accurately analysed the dilemma of Post-Impressionism and foresaw the eventual *impasse*.

'The emotional impulse of the latest phases of the movement in Paris looks to me contradictory to the creative impulse in painting. And more clearly, it seems to preclude the development of any sensibility but that of exasperated egotism. The eye becomes a little gluttonous instrument of enjoyment. Or it watches from the centre of its abstract brain-web for more flies and yet more flies. It would eventually become as mechanical and stupid as a spider, if it is not already that.'

In part IV of this fascinating pamphlet Mr. Lewis dealt with the vital question of the relation of the artist to his environment. He emphasized the difficulties of his working conditions, handicapped as he is by the absence of a coherent and generally accepted philosophy and the decaying social fabric. It is not enough, if Art is to remain in a healthy condition, to take 'a specialized visual interest in the debris on your table, or the mandoline you have just bought,' in other words, to disintegrate the visible world and build up the bits into fascinating patterns according to your private fancy.

'Your interest in the forms around you should be one liable to transfigure and constantly renew them: that would be the creative approach . . . Braque and Picasso have, indeed, changed the form content before them. Witness their little

Nature-morte concoctions. But it has only been the debris of their rooms. Had they devoted as much of their attention to changing our common life—in every way not only the bigger, but more vital and vivid, game—they would have been finer and more useful figures.'

That is all very well however. But isn't it asking rather too much of the artist? And how is this changing of our common life to be accomplished save by engaging in activities that are very apt to prove inimical to the finest effort in Artistic creation? The only life the artist can concentrate attention on and change to any purpose is the individual life. It is undeniable that a radical change is desirable before Art can be regenerated. But whatever the quality and integrity of the individual artist, the fact remains that the inner direction of what for the sake of convenience we still call Civilization is at present against him. In consequence he is driven into isolation and becomes indifferent to the life around him. By way of self-protection he begins to regard this indifference as a virtue.

'Intellectual exhaustion is the order of the day: and the work most likely to find acceptance with men in their present mood is that work that most vigorously and plainly announces the general bankruptcy and their own perdition. For the need of expression is, in a sense, never more acute than when people are imperturbably convinced of its futility. So the most alive became the most life-like wax-works of the dead.'

But in England such a state of affairs is regarded by the 'advanced' cliques as being synonymous with 'culture,' for the salvation of which everyone is now required to rush headlong into the fray.

'There is no great communal or personal force in the Western world to-day, unless some new political hegemony supply it, for Art to build on and to which to relate itself.'

That was in 1922, and certainly things look a little different to-day, but whether the changing circumstances will be accompanied by a revival in the Arts, still depends on many apparently dissociated and incalculable factors.

Mr. Watson's book is useful in so far as it dots the i's and crosses the t's of Wyndham Lewis' arguments. With epigrammatic verve it tells the bewildered layman exactly how artists nowadays live or don't live. But the underlying assumption seems to be, that if only things were managed a little more intelligently, if there were more enlightened official encouragement in this country, things needn't look so bad after all. The 60,000 young people who yearly crowd into our art schools (for reasons best known to themselves) might yet be contributing something useful. Mr. Watson gives you intriguing glimpses behind the scenes, supplies interesting information about what certain institutions do with the funds entrusted to them for the purchase of works of art, explains the attitude of town councillors towards the whole business, and in a general way succeeds in making the answer to the question, how there comes to be any art at all these days, more obscure than ever. One fact, however, to which Wyndham Lewis also draws attention, emerges quite clearly. Under present conditions professionalism in Art is on the decline. The professional artist who lives exclusively by his work and doesn't eke out a livelihood with teaching, industrial designing, etc., is becoming rarer every day. And the solemn buffoons (self-appointed protectors of the working-class, as a rule) who imagine they are fulfilling some high social purpose by encouraging miners, motor mechanics and office boys to paint pictures, and then tout round these productions as something to be gaped at admiringly by sentimental intellectuals, are only hastening his demise. It is very jolly of course for the unemployed factory hand to know that his humble dabbings are taken up by a first-class publicity racket, and that he is as good as the trained fellow who has spent a lifetime at the job any day, but that kind of thing is hardly calculated to add prestige to a great profession. There are signs, however, that this sort of nonsense at least will disappear before very long. And reading Wyndham Lewis it is possible even to be more hopeful of the future. It implies a long view no doubt and will demand great courage of the artist, a fresh attitude and a new and rigorous discipline.

RICHARD MARCH.

## RONALD BOTTRALL

*THE TURNING PATH*, by Ronald Bottrall (Barker, 5/-).

The publication of a new book of poems by Mr. Bottrall is still an important event in the literary world. When *The Loosening* first appeared, it was clear that Mr. Bottrall had, at least, a better recipe for the manufacture of verse than most others of his own generation. The rehabilitation of the Muse through a newly-awakened social consciousness had turned out to be little more than ventriloquism as the red dawn faded into clouds of Rugger Fifteen metaphysics, and even Auden's ambivalent symbols, with their inconsistently politico-Freudian interpretation, emerged (after initial promise) as too facile an attempt to short-circuit the problem of relating the difficulties of the individual consciousness to the conditions of the society in which it operated. And one didn't need to read Empson's criticism to suspect in even his very good best verse something of a technical *tour de force*.

Mr. Bottrall avoided the too easy resolution by going behind politics (the tip, of course, was Eliot's) to social anthropology. He was thus able to find terms, like the hoarding and the gramophone, which, while possible objects of immediate perception, were at the same time significant factors in the complex of social relationships. This central concern he expressed with a technical equipment which had assimilated most of the better influences of his time, utilizing the confident (and sometimes crude) run of the early Eliot satires and of the first three sections of *The Waste Land*, and the realization in muscular imagery and movement of psychological anatomization exploited by Hopkins; and occasionally the self-consciously analytical rhythms of *Mauberley*. The result was verse which, though sometimes 'slick,' was usually pointed and rarely dull. If one later found the *Festivals* somewhat pretentious, one recalled that Mr. Bottrall was still young, and the eaglet could stretch its wings without undue loss of dignity.

In the present collection Mr. Bottrall has lost none of his technical competence and certainly none of his confidence. And if nothing else raised one's suspicions, the readiness one feels to talk about 'technical competence' in abstraction in connection with the verses in this volume suggests a misdirection of interest originating with the author. The poem, *To a Chinese Girl*, by which

Mr. Bottrall was represented in the Pelican Books anthology, has these lines :

Fifty proportioned pigments will combine  
In deeper values, but vague ampersands  
Choke the lacunae of our strict design.

Unhurrying time our universe expands,  
We plot in vain the ever-changing centre,  
Our grain-concorded star-strewn cloud disbands

And we are left, ourselves our own tormentor.

The tone and method are familiar, but it isn't *Legal Fiction* or *To an Old Lady* of which one is reminded, or even of the staple of Empson's verse, but rather of those labyrinthine pages of *Seven Types* which continue to analyse a line of a Shakespeare sonnet past all possible limits of relevance. The lines quoted here are so clearly contrived from outside that it is impossible even to begin to apprehend them until a careful paraphrase has been made, and then one finds no subtlety of experience to justify the superficial complexity. The first verse quoted appears to mean that a picture may express something over and above the significance of its separate elements, but Occidental philosophy is not logically systematic ; no doubt perseverance could extract endless ramifications of the Principle of Organic Unity, but the words suggest no fusion of association to justify such analysis ; they seem intended to obscure rather than to express the meaning.

Mr. Bottrall is conscious of the dangers of over-intellectualization (he is ever-presently conscious of all the criteria of good verse), and he is careful to supply Mr. Eliot's subterranean deficiencies.

We that came here in the first leap of sex,  
With the shy, sky-entreating breasts of a girl in her teens,  
Looked out over roofs and courtyards, saw the rain  
Falling in gold bars against the sun, saw the pink beech  
Shoots wait furled. In a cup between humped mountains  
Where bishop's mitred azalea buds etch  
The declivities we learnt the quick pain  
That hot nearness of body gives to body,  
And the fragmentary easement of casual excess



runs his *Prologue*, and here his verse seems to me fully adequate to his purpose. His statement of the problem is excellent enough, outlining the dichotomy between the primitive sources of vitality on the one hand and the ramifications of intellect on the other that characterizes a mechanistic civilization. But this is too often a statement of Mr. Bottrall's own case. His verse is characteristically either an intellectual construction that describes, without expressing, the problem or situation, or a realization of directionless experience in the solar-plexus. In the nature of the case the record is more rhythmically significant than the first, but necessarily fails to produce anything more than an orgasmic effect upon the reader.

This, apparently, is the only result of Mr. Bottrall's closer approach to the problems (problems at once of psychology, sociology and verse-technique) raised in his earlier work: not, as one hoped, an increased sensitiveness with accompanying psychological insight and rhythmic subtlety, but a bifurcation of interest and method. The best verse in this volume recalls the *Loosening* poems, though the movement is significantly more brittle:

Revenge against time we have denied  
Ourselves the lifted head, relied  
On the pistol, the pacers, the held stop-watch . . .

or more crude:

Prove worthy of your high destiny  
By a stern control over petty emotion.  
Do not flinch at a hæmorrhage or a spatter  
Of brains . . .  
. . . For the high

There are glittering prizes,  
And the low, too, have some honour. Sacrifice,  
The quiet submission to bacilli,  
To throttling, lung-rotting gases, to the great  
Will of the people, we readily accept

or else, as I have suggested, is a statement of Mr. Bottrall's own case:

Time was, in the days of pilgrimage,  
When the equinox leapt as a ram, green

As an emerald at the moment of its cleavage,  
When the world ran rippling in a rune.

Now, constricted in an agony of labour  
We retch our hearts out, tearing the sublime  
To intricate motives, adequate to the hour,  
And envy no man's pedestal of rhyme.

It is significant that this last reminds us of *Maunderley*; for the composition of his own epitaphs is never likely to prove a very fertile occupation for a poet.

R. O. C. WINKLER.

## POST-MARXIST CRITICISM

*THE POET AND SOCIETY*, by Philip Henderson (Secker and Warburg, 7/6).

Mr. Henderson was lately a Marxist critic, but in the present book he prefers to pass as the impartial judge of current critical theories and attitudes. The book is recommended on the dust cover as 'independent of both cliques and movements,' but its independence, it is to be feared, is of that determined variety which is more concerned in denying affiliations than in arriving at any conclusions. One would be willing, however, to bear with Mr. Henderson if it were clear that he were only presenting a summary of critical attitudes and an analysis of several contemporary poets in their relation to society—and only this. But there is the constant, though evasive, suggestion that Mr. Henderson is propounding a thesis, yet so ambiguously is it stated and maintained that the reader remains uncertain to what degree he may give his assent. Mr. Henderson is conscious of the difficulty that confronts the poet in coming to terms with modern society; he is fully aware that the poet must come to some kind of terms, and that the Romantic answer was, after all, an evasion. In the closing paragraph of the book Mr. Henderson states that '... it is not primarily the business of the poet to be a politician, so much as to interpret imaginatively the crisis that is taking place in the mind of man. But he will be unable to do this unless he sees the world in his time as it is, and unless he shares to the full the life of his own age.' One will hardly venture to dissent from this

as it stands, but having read Mr. Henderson's book, it is necessary to question what he means by sharing the life of one's age to the full. His recurring insistence cannot but compel the reader's attention to the question as one to which Mr. Henderson intends to give an answer. But none is forthcoming. The most that Mr. Henderson does is to make suggestions in other places that must raise doubts in the reader's mind as to the nature of the participation.

In the first chapter Mr. Henderson states that 'fine living does not depend upon poetry, as Richards and Leavis assert; it depends in the last analysis upon the social organization without which there could be no poetry and no Cambridge where Messrs. Richards and Leavis can live finely.' To say that social organization is essential to fine living is about as indisputable as to say that existence is necessary for fine living. But social organization after all exists in the relations between individuals whose individuality is not lost but confirmed in any true society. To say, then, as Mr. Henderson does elsewhere, that 'the fate of the individual and our entire culture depends not so much upon self-knowledge, important as this may be, as upon the direction taken by the social and political events of our time' seems to be placing the responsibility in the wrong place. That this insistence on the primary cultural responsibility of social organization will lead to conclusions which, to many readers, must seem unfortunate is soon apparent, for Mr. Henderson, speaking of Minority Culture, says '... if our culture were exclusively in the keeping of those whose only business it was to live finely and to preserve it from every vulgar contact, it would soon die of anæmia.' The implication here is, of course, that Minority Culture consists in withdrawal and not in the application of relevant and discriminating value judgments. Quotations might be multiplied to indicate that Mr. Henderson's idea of sharing in 'present-day realities' is at least a generous one.

Yet there are passages which at first might seem to define more narrowly Mr. Henderson's position. Speaking of Chaucer, Shakespeare, and the Jacobean dramatists he says that they 'did not represent themselves as birds or clouds or flowers, but were content to be men living in the world of men. And by "content" I mean that they accepted the human lot and did not try to escape it. However much they despaired of mankind, the poets who

followed the disintegration of the mediæval unity and the eclipsed hopes of the Renaissance still faced the real world.' If this says anything at all it certainly does not answer how a poet to-day, living in a completely changed society, could share life to the full and still retain his integrity. Nor is the analysis of Hopkins, Yeats, D. H. Lawrence and Eliot enlightening on this question beyond showing how these particular poets have *not* made a full participation. But if the reader looks for more unambiguous definition of what Mr. Henderson means by sharing in this 'dynamic life' he is not likely to find it. The trouble, one cannot help suspecting, is that Mr. Henderson is not quite the lone wolf he would like to be taken for. The second chapter of the book, on Marxist critical theory, does indeed make a sustained effort at independence, but Mr. Henderson has hardly achieved that reorientation which he desires.

Indeed, the very adjective 'dynamic' should make the reader cautious. It is symptomatic of a suggestive tone which recurs repeatedly, as when, criticizing a poem of D. H. Lawrence's which speaks of 'the P. & O. and the Orient Line and all the other stinkers,' he facetiously asserts: 'It seems almost blasphemy to suggest here that Odysseus would have been only too glad of one of these masterpieces of engineering to withstand the rage of Poseidon and the assaults of Scylla and Charybdis, rather than his own frail bark. He was a wily man of many devices and would have been the first to appreciate the advantages of an Orient Line on his disastrous travels.'

The chapters which contain the analyses of individual poets cover well-ploughed ground and add nothing original. It is particularly distressing to be submitted once again to a psycho-analysis of poor Father Hopkins in which we are informed at some length that his interest in martyrs was not entirely healthy. It is difficult to see what practical significance such psycho-analytic muck-raking can possibly have except, perhaps, to indicate an aberration in much modern criticism more pronounced than anything likely to be stirred up in the process. T. S. Eliot also is made the subject of this author's psychological acumen. Mr. Eliot, we are informed, has found it impossible to love. The chapter on Yeats is meant to show that Yeats was class conscious; the one on Lawrence to show that he was deficient in a social consciousness and didn't like Communists.

E. M. BEWLEY.

## FAIRIES IN BLOOMSBOHEMIA

PORTRAIT OF STELLA BENSON, by R. Ellis Roberts  
(Macmillan, 15/-).

It is a significant fact that Stella Benson regarded her diary, which she stipulated was to remain unpublished for forty years after her death, as more important than any of her published novels—significant because it raises the problem as to how far she may be considered an artist at all, how far a sociological specimen. 'The pretender,' she wrote in *Worlds within Worlds*, 'who cannot sufficiently buttress up his secret throne with lovers and friends would do well to keep a diary. A diary—even a cruelly honest diary—is a kind of home-made lover. In the pretender's diary, though he may not be justified, he is always forgiven; though he may not be admirable, he is always visible . . . Diaries are like dreams, an inward consolation to the outwardly humiliated.' Now this is an extremely revealing quotation with reference both to Stella Benson's life and to her work; though of course it does not necessarily follow that she had not many of the qualities that any serious artist ought to have.

To a point, she really was sensitive and intelligent—to the point, at least, of being a misfit. And it is not merely that she was forced to live so long among people 'whose highest idea of wit is a joke about being drunk and whose only outlet for intelligence is Bridge'; her conviction was as passionate as that of her old Mrs. Cotton that America and all it stood for was worse than death, as one may see by comparing the following from her letters:

'It seems to me that nothing is too strong to be spoken against the spreading of cheap art, cheap semi-education and cheap morals. If I were great I would still think it a worthy use of my art to take arms against that sea. As it is I can only say that the spreading spirit of which I speak is the thing that makes me thank God I shall not be alive in fifty years' time,'

with any of old Mrs. Cotton's imprecations such as this:

'It's a mechanical voice . . . speaking cheap and easy substitutes for truth—so irresistible, in a world in which truth

has been so hard. Oh the corrupted young . . . it's not at all dreadful, Lena, to be old—now.

Would you rather have all that American ki-hindness than the glory of the unequal world?’

Stella Benson saw through the pretensions of the contemporary world with a bright bird-like worm-prodding intelligence, she impaled the Tams and Daleys of society with devastating finality. Yet all the time she half longed to be of them ; her mocking toughness arose from an agony of self-humiliation, which is the peculiar ant-like impetus from which her art springs. The sensitive souls, those who, like Lena, ‘know wildness and darkness and danger,’ are even more remorselessly pilloried than those who, like Daley, ‘*want* to think the same thoughts as millions of Americans—because their thoughts are safe and good,’ who don’t want to ‘sit apart and sneer’ ; are more ruthlessly pilloried, indeed, than those who, like Edna, are so stupid that feelings or thoughts are to them incomprehensible ; (‘Hers was an entirely stationary mind ; she did not so much think as make small statements to herself . . . “Live and let live” said Edna, and she was better at letting live than she was at living.’). Of the self-dramatizing Benson heroes and heroines Edward is an emotional and intellectual cripple, Lena is a spiritual cripple, while Francis, the final self-caricature, is explicitly a physical cripple in whom she guys herself and the sterility of her isolation. And if the Tams and Daleys are contemptible too, at least they have the best of it in that they are relatively happy, so that although she despises Daley for being submerged in the American morass of cheap beauty and idiotic art, she yet endows her with many fetching characteristics that she herself would like to share. As Lena says, ‘Honesty’s my secret vice—knowing myself’s my vice. Daley doesn’t know herself—she never could mock at herself or punish herself or tear herself in pieces. Things are so easy for her—she’s not alone—she’s a universal—she fits in’ ; while Daley herself wistfully asks ‘what’s wrong with it anyway? What is there to sneer at in being good and loving and hygienic?’

Our Heroine, then, puts up a Brave Fight ; but the laughter is croaky that hides a broken heart. Lawrence said somewhere that to break a heart was to break the spontaneous flow of com-

munion between people, and in this sense Stella really had a broken heart. One of the main themes of her books, which became more urgent as she grew older, was the impossibility of communion between people, all of whom live segregated in 'distinguished and divided worlds.' It is in this respect that she most obviously differs from E. M. Forster with whom, as a 'feminine counterpart,' she explicitly invites comparison. Like him she was intelligent about people and she was a whale for sensitiveness (consider the celebrated description of the birth of the foal in *Tobit Transplanted*), yet what is the use of being intelligent and sensitive if these qualities don't help you to live more adequately? They conspicuously helped Stella Benson to nothing more than a consciousness of failure for she could not believe, as Forster passionately believed though he too knew the difficulty of communication, in human relationships. For other people and for herself she at most had pity, at worst contempt, and so complete a deficiency in belief implies a deficiency in vitality too—an inadequacy as an artist. However objective and ruthless self-analysis may be—and the three-fold analysis of *Goodbye Stranger* with Clifford representing her isolation, Lena her self-humiliation and Daley her protective domesticity has at least the objectivity of an unsentimental bitterness—such self-analysis will produce something less than art if it is not stabilized by some kind of belief, the lack of which is attested, in *Goodbye Stranger*, by a fatal falsification in the sudden significance with which, towards the end, Mr. Lorne is invested. If one is convinced that the world is rotten and growing rottener, if one cannot believe in God and cannot trust human relationships what is there to fall back on but the fairies and a dancing wit? Neither makes a safe settee to collapse upon, the joints creak ominously as one's nonchalantly abandoned attitude precariously disguises the expectation of a shocking bump.

In the earliest fairy books there is a too patent juxtaposition of fantasy and realism combined with an insufferable archness, as in Forster's *Celestial Omnibus* stories, though naturally more feminine and kittenish. But in the last of these books, *This is the End*, the Secret Friend, the House of Living Alone, the other props to the separateness of the individual, are relinquished in favour of a stiff-lipped resignation.

' I used to think that growing up was like walking from one end of the meadow to the other ; I thought that the meadow would remain and one had only to turn one's head to see it all again. But now I know that growing up is like going through a door into a little room ; and the door shuts behind one.'

In her very first book Stella Benson had written ' Sometimes I pose, but sometimes I pose as posing ' and isn't she here ' posing as posing '? At any rate the only comment one can make on the sort of growing up that *This is the End* represents is that it is precisely the reverse—a symptom of protracted adolescence, a disease from which she never quite recovered, for it is present not only in her persistent twinklebudisms, her private canine language, the pet-names for her pleurisy, for motor-cars and hot-water-bottles, and in the groups she uneasily mingled with, but in the tenor of her work as a whole. Even in her best, her funniest, most destructive books, *The Poor Man* and *Goodbye Stranger*, I suppose the ' dazzling ' wit—genuinely the product of an agile mind netting the butterflies of unexpected relations—cannot be reckoned as aesthetically ' serious ' ; though her pernicky masochism told her of the temptations to which the ' intelligent and sensitive ' are exposed :

' It would be no good to put on a hair shirt after one had realized that a hair shirt might be rather becoming and might—failing more concrete benefits—earn one a pat on the back from God . . .

I am writing a bit but even that is prinking in a way. I say to myself " people will think that clever, therefore I also think it clever . . . " '

Certainly the preoccupation with the ' bone ' ( ' shut away, inside an inside-out sock, free from clamour and thought, resentment and preference '), with the point of view of people *as other people*, with people ' seeing by themselves,' with the problem of Us and Me, which figures so largely in the latest books, must be regarded as a weakening rather than a strengthening in integrity of purpose, for no writer who is worth his salt can ' withhold comment,' least of all as self-conscious a writer as Stella Benson ; it is the scope and sanity—the impartiality, all the traits we summarize as the



impersonality—of the comment that counts, in other words it is the values the author believes in. The scope and sanity of Stella Benson's vision were limited not by her having a personality but by her inability to escape a personal manner, to separate the woman who 'suffered' from the creative mind. Whether you regard the inability as a deficiency of character or of civilization makes little odds, but beside it even Mr. Forster's most ambiguous whimsicality seems curiously untrivial. Stella Benson's 'comment,' in *Mundos*, did not really become less personal and if it appeared to do so to herself it was merely because she was seeking for ideological substitutes for her lack of belief. The little shafts of wit tickle the contemptible or pathetic denizens of *Mundos* and finally pierce Stella in the punchinello of Francis; but when the wit is extended beyond insects to ideas it stands confessed as intellectual persiflage, not incisive but verbose. Verbosity defeats its own ends; the impaling process must be managed neatly or not at all. Really the only positive that emerges from the call of bone to bone is the conviction that things temporal are comparatively unimportant. This though not a footling or insincere reflection is basically sentimental and unsatisfying because one has then to ask the question—Important or unimportant by what standards and with reference to what? It is a question to which Stella Benson never found any answer, which was perhaps the tragedy of her generation. Mrs. Woolf bumped her head at the end of the same cul-de-sac when she wrote *The Years*, though her way out had been through a poetic sensuousness rather than through a feminine wit and the pranks of exacerbated fairies. Of course Stella, as we have seen, was always something a bit less than an artist, a solitary fairy pirouetting in comically berserk desperation and in various minatory Canute-like postures before the advancing tide of our contemporary ignominy. Yet, failing a Forsterian conformity with 'the liberal tradition,' her escape from the ignominy was not much more unacceptable than the average—than that, say, of Mrs. Woolf herself or of Peter Warlock except in so far as these two had a streak of genius compared with her modest share of talent, and possibly just because she was less of an artist she was a more representative figure.

She had, anyway, for all her broken heart, a jaunty wiry energy in everyday affairs so that at the practical manifestations

of her feminism—her work for the suffragettes and against licensed prostitution in Hong Kong—we certainly can't afford to smile. Indeed from the difficulties embodied in her life and in her funny but hopelessly unhappy books we can none of us be quite immune, and Mr. Ellis Roberts' pretentious volume has done her a disservice in elevating her among the literary giants and giantesses, beyond the reach of those she could pity and be pitied by. For the essence of her plight is that her 'elfin spirit' *wanted* to believe if only she could have been strong enough to find something to believe in. But, like her Tanya, she was 'both too near and too far. She loved her neighbour as herself, because she found herself in her neighbour; but if you *were* her neighbour, you found that she loved you no better than herself—which was not at all . . . Love of her neighbour was a thing felt stilly, thinly diffused among pitied lovers—puppies—parents—flowers—insects—even things . . . Real people (she thought) like to be nagged at, nagged at by love and other things. Only hills and rivers and flowers and animals are allowed to be free—not to ask for anything.' Yet how could a sympathy with dumb beasts and inanimate things bring Stella hope or relief when she herself was inescapably human and when the one thing one can be certain of about animals and things is that they are *not* human but unanswerably *other* and remote? The sympathetic portrayal of Seryozha the child of nature, and the tenderness towards persons such as Wilfred Chew that, almost for the first time, enters into *Tobit Transplanted*, is her 'illusory salvation from an illusory devil, her deepest anchor to normality, her licence to believe herself a woman plucked out of shameful fairyhood, her defence against being an outlaw and alone'; it is the voice of the prodigal daughter crying in vain for the caressing arms of a humanity that, along with herself, she had persistently withered with contumely. Crying in vain because, although she came tardily to recognize 'the humanity of humanity,' she never learned to accept it. The pretence of Separateness, or the pretence of Togetherness—what were they in the long run but the most pitiful instances of the incurable and inexhaustible vanity of mankind? 'Nothing's so very sacred as all that to any of us really,' says Seryozha, 'nothing except our vanity . . . And when we're dead, our vanity's dead too, damn it all, so—what of it?'

Perhaps it is not difficult to understand why those people of

her generation and ours who peek at the world through the spy-glass of their chronically sore vanities—as we have most of us done at one time or another—should have taken Stella Benson to their hearts ; it is less easy to understand why the literary pundits should have been content to accept her as an accomplished artist, as an author of major contemporary importance.

W. H. MELLERS.

## CRITICAL GUIDANCE AND CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE

*THE PRESENT AGE FROM 1914 (INTRODUCTIONS TO ENGLISH LITERATURE, Vol. V), by Edwin Muir (Cresset Press, 6/-).*

One approaches this book with pleasant expectations and some apprehension. A book by Mr. Muir must, one is sure, be very different from the kind of thing that such a title would ordinarily lead one to expect ; and yet the difficulties and temptations in the way of the enterprise indicated by the title, especially when this is to figure in an academic series of ' Introductions,' are so formidable. The aim of the series is, the General Editor tells us,

' to enable anyone who wishes, to get a clear idea of any one period by reading with a certain degree of fervour for a year . . . '

To expect that literary historians should be original critics is to expect with little justification in experience ; but certainly an introduction to contemporary literature, if it is to go any way towards fulfilling the function assigned it, or to be worth anything at all, must be written by a critic who is both able and ready to make sharp and boldly explicit discriminations regarding value and significance—who is, in fact, intent on making them.

Although Mr. Muir says (p. 143) that ' this book is concerned with history rather than with criticism,' his practice shows that he knows that criticism is his essential business ; and it is because of his critical qualifications that his book stands in a class apart from the usual industrious register of names and titles (see, e.g., the little productions of Mr. A. C. Ward). Because he is an intelli-

gent critic of particular authors he is able to illuminate his chosen field with comparative generalities about periods ; for example :

‘ In Victorian times the imaginative writer could be popular only by writing loosely. It may be said that to-day he can be widely popular only by writing falsely ’ (p. 30).

One’s disagreements with his particular judgments are often of a kind one expects to be brought to in any profitable reading of criticism, and to disagree isn’t necessarily to impugn his services as an ‘ introducer.’ For instance, when he says (p. 89) of the best things of Hopkins,

‘ There is nothing for weight and volume in the poetry of his time to set beside them, excepting perhaps some lines of Browning,’

I exclaim at what seems to me the indefensible compliment to Browning, but I shouldn’t think of suggesting that, because of it, the reader capable of profiting by Mr. Muir’s guidance over Hopkins will profit any the less. Again, while applauding the way in which Mr. Muir, comparing the three poets, insists on Eliot’s pre-eminence. I think that he at the same time does Yeats an injustice by appearing to bring him down to one level with Pound (for I take Yeats to be very much the greater poet of the two) ; nevertheless, I shouldn’t say that the introduction the reader gets to Yeats is insufficient—Mr. Muir says some very acute and interesting things, and, thus introduced, Yeats should be able to look after himself.

But a difference in valuation does, where Pound is concerned, lead me to judge that Mr. Muir here misdirects his reader unfortunately. If *Maunderley* deserves no higher rating than Mr. Muir gives it, then I think Pound must be a less interesting poet than he suggests. To direct the reader to the earlier poems (see p. 65), except by way of *Maunderley*, seems to me to be doing Pound an ill service. But then I value *Maunderley* more highly than Mr. Muir does. Referring to Mr. Eliot’s introduction to *Selected Poems*, he says that he cannot admit that *Maunderley* is ‘ genuine tragedy, or a criticism of life in the best sense.’ The terms, of course, haven’t any precise values, but I am convinced that the difference between Mr. Muir and Mr. Eliot derives from a failure of apprecia-

tion on the part of Mr. Muir. Discussing the *Cantos* he says, very relevantly, that Social Credit 'is not a substitute for a genuine criticism' of life, any more than Dialectical Materialism is.' The point about *Mauberley* is that while technique in that poem is not (as so often in Pound) merely that of the skilled verse-maker, but subserves the poet's most serious reactions to the world he lives in, the seriousness is so radical as to preclude even a suggestion of any such substitute for a 'criticism of life' as Social Credit is, along with other superficial egotisms and insistences, in the *Cantos*. Pound, for once, is impersonally serious almost in spite of himself, and, though something must be conceded to Mr. Muir's limiting criticisms, the reader who responds to the deep resonances ('vacuos exercet aera morsus') of those most moving and technically consummate sections which may be said to constitute the personal core of the poem—'*For three years diabolus in the scale*' and '*For this agility chance found*'—and who feels the relation between these sections and the rest, will not hesitate to talk of 'tragedy' in connection with the poem as Mr. Eliot does. Is even the satire of *Yeux Glauques* and 'Siëna mi fe ; disfecemi Maremma' the satire of the Pound whose Hell (see Mr. Muir, p. 80) is 'for other people, the people we read about in the newspapers, not for oneself and one's friends'? To state it at the lowest, time is felt too profoundly in this poem to permit of Pound's usual egotism. In saying 'tragedy' Mr. Eliot indicated the unique place of *Mauberley* in Pound's work. The peculiar difficulty of approach that the poem would appear to offer makes insistence on its uniqueness the more politic when one aims at getting due recognition for Pound.

But this is the kind of argument one expects to be provoked to as a part of the profit of reading an interesting critic ; no comment I have yet made is intended as a serious adverse criticism of the value of Mr. Muir's book for its purpose. Where I have, I think, serious criticism to urge is where he makes comparisons between the phase of poetic history represented by Eliot and that represented by Auden and Spender :

' But society went on falling apart with a fitful and alarming acceleration, and the generation of Auden and Spender could no longer see any choice but to hasten the process and work for a new order ' (p. 34).

Mr. Muir has some admirable critical pages on Auden, but he nowhere makes the point that Auden's representative quality is not the altogether respectable thing, and cannot be adequately discussed in the creditable terms, suggested in the quoted sentence. Auden is representative in belonging to a period that doesn't permit its talents to develop into representative significance as Eliot has it. An Introduction to the Present Age that should really give the guidance offered would discuss those characteristics of the age, especially as focussed in the literary world, which make Auden, if we judge him in his writings, as essentially immature at over thirty as he was at eighteen.

I can see, of course, difficulties in the way of Mr. Muir's embarking on such a discussion in his book. That he shouldn't say bluntly that Day Lewis isn't a poet at all and his being taken as a leader of a Poetic Renaissance is a characteristic absurdity of the age seems to me a related failure. For Mr. Muir doesn't, I think, really disagree with me about Day Lewis—as he does, I'm afraid, about Spender. Not that I am for a moment accusing him of a politic economy of critical frankness. I think rather that he is unwittingly illustrating the need of critical help his postulated reader may be presumed to stand in. If so experienced a critic as Mr. Muir finds it hard to maintain a policy of 'sharp and boldly explicit discrimination' in the face of contemporary literature, the postulated green explorer is likely to put in more than a year's reading, however fervent, without profiting much by experience.

Actually—and this is my major criticism of his book—Mr. Muir did not prescribe that policy for himself, at any rate with the intensity that seems to me appropriate. In fact, his dissent from the prescription, and his reply to my criticism, may perhaps be found implicit in a phrase he throws out in referring (in flattering terms) to my own work—he speaks of its 'narrow temper.' In any case, I think that a more rigorous and exclusive spirit would have increased the value of his book for its expressed purpose. Does it really help the inexperienced reader to be told that the Georgian movement produced 'a number of poets of great interest'? I don't suppose that Mr. Muir has substantially more use for Squire, Shanks, Drinkwater, Freeman and company than I have myself, but there is a misleading absence of astringency in his descriptive references to them.

And, as a matter of fact, I believe that an absence of an insistently and rigorously discriminative spirit in comment and reference does tend to merge into a laxity of essential judgment. For instance, not only is Mr. Muir not astringent in dealing with the Sitwells; he seems to me absurdly respectful towards them. That is, I disagree with his valuation and I think he is wrong. I could go on enumerating instances. And in general I am convinced that the reader who comes away from the book feeling that he ought to be as respectful towards as many poets as Mr. Muir suggests has had difficulties that lie in the way of his development reinforced.

In having to deal with fiction in the space at his disposal Mr. Muir is of course faced with a desperately difficult task. My own task as a reviewer I propose to simplify unfairly by picking on the places where I especially wish to ejaculate disagreement. A number of them are conveniently brought together in this sentence (p. 153):

' . . . one cannot help feeling that the age of *Ulysses*, *Sons and Lovers*, *Tarr*, *Mrs. Dalloway*, *Men and Wives*, and *Nightwood*, is a great age of the English novel.'

I can see why *Tarr* should have been a 'good thing' among the best tipsters when my generation refilled the universities in 1919, but it seems to me very far from being the achieved masterpiece, or the highly significant work, that Mr. Muir suggests. (He is altogether too kind to Wyndham Lewis—*Time and Western Man* and company are not really books but bluffs). Then the book Mrs. Woolf should be represented by is, surely, not *Mrs. Dalloway* but *To the Lighthouse*? As for *Men and Wives*, the reputation enjoyed by Miss Compton Burnett has yet to be explained to me. But it is Mr. Muir's endorsement of *Nightwood* that most, I think, needs protesting against. Mr. Eliot's superlative exaltation of that book seems to have imposed it generally—it goes down to posterity a classic. Yet the piece of it that Mr. Muir quotes merely confirms my conviction that it is both bogus, in an innocent way, and dismally boring, a representative product of the post-Joyce, post-Eliot transition-Parisian-American cultural milieu, almost touching in the naïve sophistication of its interest in Evil. Still, I have to confess that Mr. Muir has had, so far as I know, all the reviewers

with him. There has been an apparent unanimity too about *Maurice Guest*, by Henry Handel Richardson, which Mr. Muir calls (p. 131) 'probably the last great novel in the traditional style which has appeared in English'—'it remains as astonishing to-day as when it was first published.' What is astonishing to me is the reputation of the book, which I find disqualifyingly melodramatic, naïve and incompetent.

About Arnold Bennett Mr. Muir is admirably severe (I wish he had been as firm about Mr. Walpole). He is also salutary on the fashionable detective-fictioneers:

' Their brilliance is the most vulgar thing in contemporary literature ; their wit is execrable . . . '

These instances do not fairly offset the adverse suggestion of the foregoing paragraph, but they must suffice as a reminder that Mr. Muir is a vigorously independent critic—which no follower of his reviewing is likely to have forgotten. The trouble is that to-day, when standards disappear beneath the multiplying masterpieces and significant works, and the conferring by an ancient university of a doctorate upon Mr. P. G. Wodehouse evokes nothing but applause, not even the most vigorous and leisured of critics is likely to have found time and energy to make all the critical decisions that the cultivated person is supposed to have made, or to be capable of making after a certain bestowal of leisure upon varied perusals. The more necessary a form, then, of critical co-operation—the 'common pursuit of true judgment'—is the sharp challenge. I will end with one more: has Mr. Muir really read through and critically digested Christopher Caudwell's *Illusion and Reality* (see p. 176), which the writer of a conscientious adverse review once told me had 'cost him more pain to get through than any other book he had ever tackled'? There are too many of these reputations.

F. R. LEAVIS.



## MR. WILSON KNIGHT

*THE BURNING ORACLE*, by G. Wilson Knight (O.U.P., 12/6).

The title of this book is a quotation from Byron's *Sardanapalus*, 'Thou true sun! The burning oracle of all that lives . . .'; the sub-title is 'Studies in the Poetry of Action,' and the book itself is a collection of essays on Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, Swift, Pope and Byron. Mr. Knight's intention is to analyse the work of these writers with a view to discovering its relation to Christianity on the one hand, and the sexual instinct on the other; the most profound literature, in his view, relying on a reconciliation of these two elements. Whether the importance of the *agape-eros* centre (to resort to Mr. Knight's idiom) depends upon its being the mainspring of the best literature, or whether the value of a literary work is judged by its exhibiting, of failing to exhibit, the *agape-eros* centre as its main axis of reference, never becomes clear. It is perhaps not a fair question in any case; but the reader may be assisted in determining his own attitude on this point by the bibliography of modern literature conforming to the required criticism volunteered by Mr. Knight: including Tennyson, Browning, *The Dynasts*, *The Waste Land* and *Triumphal March*, O'Casey's *Within the Gates*, and John Cowper Powys's *Glastonbury Romance*, 'perhaps the greatest work of our generation'; on the other hand, he may not.

It is perhaps fairest to Mr. Knight to discount his metaphysical programme and consider his analyses of the individual authors for what local value they have. Remarks of his own partly justify such a proceeding: 'We must, however, beware of any facile definition of the relation borne by poetic art to ethics, sexual or political'; and, 'The world-view of a poet is now to be distinguished finally from the type of poetic expression it dictates.' One is reminded by such remarks that Mr. Knight is the man who wrote *The Wheel of Fire*. And in fact this book is valuable in much the same way as *The Wheel of Fire* was valuable, though to a lesser degree: an intelligent and properly-equipped critic can make profitable use of the material, and even of the suggested lines of approach, here accumulated. Mr. Knight's catholic enthusiasm tends to obscure his thesis in a welter of trivialities: the essay on Pope, for example, includes a close analysis of *Windsor*

*Forest*, *The Rape of the Lock*, *Eloisa to Abelard* and *The Dunciad*, and a paraphrase and analysis of each of the *Essay on Man* and the *Essay on Criticism*. This eclecticism results from, and illustrates, Mr. Knight's misdirection of interest. A poem like *Eloisa to Abelard*, for example, provides him with much powder and shot for his argument about the reconciliation of sexual and religious interests ; and he is able to point to certain qualities in the verse considered as poetry. But only by a critical sleight-of-hand does he treat *The Dunciad* on equal basis as also exhibiting certain qualities as poetry ; ignoring the fact that the qualities exhibited by *The Dunciad* are considerably more significant to a literary critic than those exhibited by the earlier poem, and it is from that consideration that he, as critic, should have started. Occasionally he has to strain every nerve to bring some particularly penetrating remark on, for example, Pope's humour, into line with his general argument, contriving thereby only to obscure its point.

Thus one goes through the book marking passages of interest, coming upon two pages on Spenser (13 and 14) :

' There is an addition of image to image, of verbal music to verbal music, a diffusion rather than concentration, an essentially stanzaic sequence, but no complex intertwined multiplication of significances . . . Often Spenser seems more interested in his abstract doctrine than his critical world ; or, if his world grips him, he seems to forget, for a stanza or two, his message, which is temporarily smothered by the luxuriant impressionism . . . *The Fairy Queen* is an eye-feast, an ear-feast, a mind-feast, but it is not a shared action, it is without dramatic suspense. People do things, but at a distance, like figures on a tapestry.'

But a page or two later we find

' Spenser's expressly *gentle* humanism . . . nevertheless itself draws him finally nearer to the consistently trusting humanists, Lyly, Shakespeare, and Pope, than to the variously forceful distrusters, Marlowe and Milton.'

The affinities with Milton, in the use of language and imagery, and even in psychopathology, that Mr. Knight's own analysis of Spenser reveals, are ignored, in favour of the implications of one isolated aspect of the poet's ideology.

In the essay on Pope, the main fact is, as I have suggested already, a lack of proportion. There are some very interesting remarks on the Sporus portrait (p. 186 ff.):

‘ Whatever or whoever the human prototype this is scarcely a rounded study ; but neither is there any single *idea* behind its creation, as there is, for example, behind Sir Epicure Mammon. It is caught straight from contact with those human personalities stated by Pope himself to be irreducible to concepts or to principles of reason . . . Pope distils, compresses, and ejects through one person the living essence of a whole poisoned society . . . Yet the creation is paradoxical since its very intensity is set to constitute a condemnation of non-being. Sporus is vigorously inactive and powerfully a nothing.’

The analysis on which these comments are based is more interesting than the comments themselves. But in the ensuing discussion on the justifiability of much satire from a Christian point of view, the significant connection of this kind of satire with, say, the third *Moral Essay* on the one hand, and with *The Dunciad* on the other, is quite lost. The necessary material is there in the essay, but Mr. Knight is more concerned to justify Pope’s kind of humour in the light of the *Essay on Man* than to allow his interest to be directed by the quality of the poetry.

It is not surprising, then, when he finds Byron’s affinities to lie with Shakespeare rather than Pope—‘ Byron’s poetic interests are, like Shakespeare’s, at once subjective, personal, social, political, naturalistic, and cosmic ’—and this on the showing mainly of *Marino Faliero* and *Sardanapalus* ; in this connection he refers to Byron as ‘ a dramatist of Shakespearean calibre ’—a remark whose effect is not so much to raise our opinion of Byron as a dramatist as to lower our opinion of Mr. Knight as a critic. His main interest is plainly in certain ethical conceptions suggested by Byron, but he is careful to support his contention with analysis of the verse at relevant points. This part of the book, with that on Pope, is an interesting object-lesson in the way in which practical criticism can be made to subserve an already orientated interest, and an indication that bad poetry has a ‘ technique ’ just as much as good. The ethical implications of literary criticism cannot be circumvented by operating purely in terms of technical analysis ;

that a poet does what he wants to do is no proof that what he wants to do is worth doing. An abstract from Byron's verse may reveal an ethic similar to Shakespeare's (Mr. Knight contrives to make it do so); and Byron may express what he has to say quite adequately (as Shakespeare does); but the relation between Byron's ethics and his technique of expression is of so different a kind from the comparable relation in Shakespeare as to make all the significant difference from the point of view of literary value.

Perhaps the most disturbing essay is that on Milton. One is ordinarily inclined to respect Mr. Knight as something of an untutored genius with an *idée fixe* whose singularity of interest may throw some new light on the old familiar faces. In the essay on Milton his accumulation of material constitutes the most damning indictment of Milton I have yet seen, apart from Dr. Tillyard's book. He analyses Milton's imagery intensively, showing its insistent efforts to make the fluid rigid, to make the natural artificial, and to preserve a purely surface consistency; and draws all the relevant implications, not the least of which is that Milton fails signally in the realization of the Christianity-eros balance. Yet in spite of this Mr. Knight insists, quite illogically, on Milton's greatness as a poet, specifically pointing out that he doesn't draw the same conclusions as certain 'other critics,' and carefully referring in conciliatory terms to Messrs. Eliot and Leavis on the one hand, and (much more conciliatory) to Messrs. C. S. Lewis, Tillyard and Charles Williams on the other: a proceeding he seems to find unnecessary in other essays where his findings are more in accordance with the accepted habits of critical thinking. We recall that for each of us personally, and for the literary-critical world in general, Mr. Knight was one of the major influences in reorientating the stereotyped approach to Shakespeare; it is to be hoped that his original approach will not be used in the interests of pedestrian orthodoxy in other fields.

R. O. C. WINKLER.

## POPE ON THE UPSWING

*THE TWICKENHAM EDITION OF THE POEMS OF ALEXANDER POPE, Vol. IV : IMITATIONS OF HORACE, Ed. by John Butt (Methuen, 15/-).*

*THE POETICAL CAREER OF ALEXANDER POPE, by Robert Kilburn Root (Princeton University Press and Humphrey Milford, 11/6).*

Even those who cannot help an inner sinking when they contemplate the enshrinement of poets in monuments of scholarship will agree that the new edition of Pope, of which Volume IV is the first to be issued, seems likely to justify itself. Pope is pre-eminently a poet who calls for a scholarly apparatus, and Elwin and Courthope didn't make a final job of it. The apparatus in the present volume has been introduced with judgment. The reader will be glad to have the original texts of Horace and Donne set, page by page, over against Pope's 'imitations'; the necessary information about each work is handily placed; and intelligent economy has been exercised in the matter of footnotes.

Yet the prominence of the footnotes gives an edge to the question whether three sentences above a damaging concession wasn't made at Pope's expense. Actually, when the volume containing the *Dunciad* appears the proportion of footnotes to text in, say, Book III of that poem will probably turn out to be not notably less, and I do not think that, there, any adverse conclusion should be admitted. Nevertheless, a reading of the present volume does bring home to one that a great deal of Pope's work was of its time in a way that irremediably impoverishes its life for us: too great a part in it is played by topicalities and particularities that must now remain mere references to footnotes. The brilliance is everywhere, but the *Epistle to Arbuthnot* is the only piece in the book of which one can unhesitatingly say that it deserves to be current as a poem of classical standing and an illustration of Pope's genius.

The very positive culture that saw itself as Augustan, and expressed itself characteristically in the habit of 'imitation' didn't bring the best out of Pope. Wide-ranging as were the freedoms he permitted himself, 'imitation' didn't favour the controlling

and directing of the dispersed effects of his satire by dominant drives of interest ; it favoured, rather, a weak discursiveness, an exasperating bluff of continuity, and some of the less agreeable manifestations of Pope's interest in couplets.

The cultural advantages represented by the Horatianizing appear rather in work not included in this volume ; in, for instance, the best of the Moral Essays—notably in the one of which Professor Root says (p. 184) :

' When one thinks of the *Epistle to the Earl of Burlington* it is the picture of Timon's villa, rather than the didactic thesis that utility and good sense are the indispensable foundation of good taste, that at once springs to the memory.'

Of the ' didactic thesis ' Mr. Root says no more. Yet the most remarkable thing about the epistle—that which makes it representative of Pope's greatness—is the way in which the malicious vivacity of the passage on Timon's villa passes, with perfect sureness, into the solemn didacticism of those closing paragraphs in which the substance of the ' thesis '—

'Tis Use alone that sanctifies Expense,  
And Splendour borrows all her rays from Sense

—is realized imaginatively in a rich, varied and triumphant poetry. This poetry, the more significant by reason of where it comes, could have been written only by a great poet whose imagination was informed, and whose pen controlled, by a fine and generally shared ideal of civilized order—an ideal that had some basis in actuality. No analysis of Pope's art that doesn't lead to such considerations as these can come near his greatness or even do justice to his technical skill and his cleverness.

So it is that, though Mr. Root gives a good deal of space to discussing Pope's technique, he doesn't really get much said. He rightly insists on the variety of the Augustan couplet as handled by Pope, but is unable to go far in describing the nature and conditions of that variety. His book, in fact, is not what the dust-jacket says it is,

' a new interpretation and a fresh appraisal for modern readers of a famous poet whose reputation is now very decidedly on the upswing ' ;

it is, rather, a now familiar kind of evidence that the change in taste that set in two decades ago has made itself felt even in conservative academic preserves.

Mr. Root's acceptance of Pope is complete, and the worst of complete acceptance is that it precludes appreciation. To show equal enthusiasm for the *Essay on Man* and the *Dunciad* is not really to advance the recognition of Pope's genius. Mr. Root calls attention to the prejudices and preferences of nineteenth-century taste that stand (or stood) between Pope and recognition—

' not a few modern readers, I imagine, would think that the temper of satire is alien to that of poetry '

and

' A generation ago literary historians of the eighteenth century spent much of their time in hunting for so-called "precursors" of romanticism '

—but, in the traditional way, he brackets the *Unfortunate Lady* with *Eloïsa* (they are ' in substance, if not in execution, romantic '), which no one could do who recognized the extraordinary distinction of the *Elegy*. True, of this he adds that

' Its literary virtues spring not from Pope's heart, but from his exquisite mastery of the art of poetic expression ' ;

but then (with Lytton Strachey and other good company) he finds the well-known couplet,

Lo! where Mæotis sleeps, and hardly flows  
The freezing Tanais thro' a waste of snows,

worth exclaiming upon (and analysing) as an instance of that mastery. And the passages he quotes as ' poetry of a high order ' have usually little to distinguish them but an obvious poeticality.

But he has at any rate, while presenting his lecture-audiences (one presumes) with a useful selection of relevant information, exhorted them to find Pope a living and lively poet—though I myself think Pope better served by one's confining one's enthusiastic recommendation to a comparatively few things, *e.g.*, the *Elegy on the Unfortunate Lady*, *Epistles III* and *IV* in the *Moral Essays*, the *Epistle to Arbuthnot* and the fourth book of the *Dunciad*.

As already intimated, Volume IV of the new edition contains the 'versifications' of Donne's satires, and this relevant passage from the Introduction (p. 42) seems worth quoting:

'Pope's attention to Donne's *Satires* should not give any cause for surprise. Though he and his contemporaries may not have read Donne with the enthusiasm with which we read him to-day, certainly they read him. Tonson, the publisher, considered that there was sufficient demand for a new edition of the poems in 1714; and fifteen of them are found in Dryden's *Miscellany*, the most popular and representative anthology of the period, re-issued for the fifth time in 1727. Spence records that Pope held Donne's poetry in high repute . . .'

The liking for Donne may be correlated with this comment on Milton, which Spence also records (Mr. Root quotes it):

'The high style, that is affected in so much blank verse, would not have been borne, even in Milton, had not his subject turned so much on such strange out-of-the-world things as it does.'

How habitual was the Augustan assumption regarding the proper relation between poetry and the spoken language may be gathered from the following couplet, which occurs in the 'imitation' of Horace Ep. I, Lib. II, but is Pope's unprompted contribution:

What will a Child learn sooner than a song?  
What better teach a Foreigner the tongue?

That last argument could hardly have occurred to a defender of the Poet in the nineteenth century. It is of the essential strength of Pope that the point could seriously have been made of his own best poetry.

F. R. LEAVIS.



# SCRUTINY

## A Quarterly Review

*Edited by*

D. W. HARDING

L. C. KNIGHTS

F. R. LEAVIS

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# THE SPENS REPORT

## A SYMPOSIUM-REVIEW<sup>1</sup>

' This closeness of connection between the character of a society and the character of its education cannot be too strongly stressed. Schools and colleges are not something apart from the social order to which they belong. They are that order trying to prepare its youth for participation in its own activities. And a society can only teach the hopes, the knowledge, the values, the beliefs which it has.'

Alexander Meiklejohn, *The Experimental College*.

**I**F these depressing considerations leave some of us (including Dr. Meiklejohn) still arduously interested in education, it must be because it is still possible to believe that the obvious drift—or drive—of civilization doesn't exhaustively represent the ' hopes, the knowledge, the values, the beliefs ' of the society to which we belong. And in fact it is in that society conventionally assumed that education should be in some ways concerned with counter-ing certain characteristic tendencies of civilization. Those of us who are not completely pessimistic are committed to believing that this assumption is in some measure justified by a correspondent reality, one which we ought to do our utmost to make more effective.

In bold moments a complementary proposition to Dr. Meiklejohn's may perhaps be thrown out: namely, that schools and colleges are, or should be, society trying to preserve and develop a continuity of consciousness and a directing sense of value—a sense of value informed by a traditional wisdom. Any serious

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<sup>1</sup>*Report of the Consultative Committee on Secondary Education* (H.M. Stationery Office, 3/6).

Eight contributors, the editors' indebtedness to whom is not to be measured by amount of quotation or particular reference, sent in commentaries on the Report.

notion of education would seem to involve both propositions. Their reconciliation in practice, things being as they are to-day, cannot be provided for by any simple formula. A complete and happy reconciliation would clearly involve more than educational reform. The problem facing the critic of an official report on a national system of education is correspondingly difficult. There will be the question of the criterion, and no simple answer to it.

Most of the critics whose opinions are reported in what follows write as educationists engaged in practice within the system, and, whatever radical questions or doubts they may glance at, set their main criterion by the kind of improvement that might, from such a point of view, reasonably be hoped for.

‘ The general trend of the report is praiseworthy. No teacher genuinely interested in education would be likely to quarrel with its aim, though, naturally, there may be differences of opinion on details of method.

One’s chief criticism would be on the grounds of vagueness.’

This correspondent is borne out in the expectation expressed in the second sentence quoted : the actual teachers among the symposiasts take on the whole a similar line. They repeat too the charge of vagueness. This, for instance, is representative :

‘ The first important chapter is Chapter IV, on the curriculum. This chapter (like most of the Report, in fact) is difficult to judge partly because of the vagueness of much of it and partly because of the general Fabian tone. The survey of the “ principles of the curriculum ” rarely engages with the concrete : one is irritated by the inanimate loftiness of the expression. One’s comment is “ Yes, but what do you mean, exactly?” ’

Nevertheless there is agreement, though the expression is not always so emphatic, to the following effect (to quote a third correspondent) :

‘ The general pronouncements of the Report are of great value in that they give support to aims and methods long recognized by intelligent opinion, but still too often ineffective against professional conservatism.’

What in particular meets with the approval of all the teachers is the insistence on English :

' The importance of English, in all its aspects, as "capable of giving a meaning and unity to the whole course." '

Most of them, however, qualify their approval more or less severely, *e.g.*:

' But it is in the section on "literary appreciation" that the committee's vacuity about "English" is most blatant. This is full of the vague inanities beloved of conventional anthology introductions: "learning to enjoy as well as understand," "seeing beauty as well as comprehending meaning," "to enjoy literary power and meaning," "to distinguish gold from tinsel," "we may not be convinced of the danger of 'tasting the Pierian spring,' but certainly it is our aim that all English men and women should of their own will 'drink deep of it'" . . . moreover there are very few recommendations about method . . . '

In this kind of criticism this critic has fairly general support ; as also in the following:

' But I'm disconcerted right at the start by the odd order of the "English" subjects. A "reasonably wide reading" of English comes fourth, separated from a "training in clear and precise expression of ideas" by History and Geography. How this training and how training in real comprehension (mentioned perfunctorily in this section) can be given without Literature, one can't quite see. I should welcome more details about the "other exercises" mentioned in the sentence: "we have still much to learn from the methods of teaching composition employed in French Schools and we should welcome these and other exercises designed to develop powers of comprehension and expression." This will be an incentive to the educational publisher but not much else.'

This last note is struck again by another critic:

' If the Committee had been obliged (it wasn't) to accept the present S.C., one would then have been grateful for some of their suggestions ; *e.g.*, in English they disapprove of set books and advocate a simple test in the use and understanding of the English language as a necessary qualification for obtaining a School Certificate. But the Committee must be very innocent

if it cannot visualize School Certificate forms spending a year or more doing nothing but tests in the use and understanding of English from the dead little manuals which the "educational" publishers are already selling.'

And here we come to the point most strongly urged in qualification of the approval given to the general aim of the Report in matters of curriculum: only one of the teachers who wrote at any length didn't explicitly censure the attitude taken by the Committee towards the external examination system. The correspondent just quoted writes:

'The Report quotes severe criticism of the School Certificate: it determines the curriculum, narrowing and stereotyping it (p. 80—also p. 142). "Drastic reform" (p. xxvi) is therefore necessary. Their proposals for reform are on p. 260 ff. . . .

So far as the S.C. is concerned their recommendations are mere tinkering with the machinery—which is perhaps inherently stultifying and incapable of reform. Here was an opportunity for one or more of the 500 or so witnesses to say "abolish the thing." But if any of them did, it must have shocked the Committee, because no such suggestion appears. It is deplorable that the Committee, having got so far as to accept some radical criticisms of S.C., should (in its timidity?) lose such a chance of real reform . . . There is no case for retaining S.C.'

Another correspondent writes:

'If the external exam. remains, whatever it is called and however "liberal" a syllabus it permits, it will always be the first aim of most schools to get as many children through it as possible and that will always mean standardization, mass-production, rigidity, uniformity and the rest. The Committee make no attempt to diagnose the real reason for the retention of the exam.: the profits made by the examining bodies.'

A good many other particular points were made by the half-dozen critics (for that was the number) writing as teachers, but, interesting as further quotation would be, space is lacking. Their general attitude has been sufficiently indicated—though scrupulousness dictates the final remark that one of them was a good deal less

severe in qualifying an approval of the general aims of the Report than suggested above.

The two correspondents who remain to be considered demand more space individually. Neither is a school-teacher, though both are qualified by immediately relevant professional experience. Their criticism of the Report is radically adverse, but from something like opposite points of view, as will be seen. One wrote a considered critique which will be printed last; the other, though busy and hurried, was kind enough to supply these notes:

'I have only time to make one point—to suggest it, I should say, since I shan't have the time to bring up all the evidence.

'This point is that the Report is in intention, and probably will be in effect, thoroughly reactionary (I am not suggesting that the members of the Consultative Committee are anything but "progressive" and "liberal").

'After the last election the Government issued its educational programme; in that programme the two chief points were the development of technical education and of physical training. That is, the Government was concerned then as now with procuring national efficiency; *i.e.*, with producing a nation fit to go to war. (And this means, of course, a nation that won't use its intelligence, physique, technical efficiency, to oppose the policies and systems of the groups in power.

'Academic secondary education—whatever its weaknesses—was dangerous. It needed to be restricted more closely to the members of the groups in power. (During the last slump-crisis, in 1931 I think, Dean Inge said: "In the past the public-school man has been exposed only to the natural competition of his own class. But now our sons have to meet the artificial competition deliberately created by the Government, who are educating the children of the working man at our expense in order that they may take the bread out of our children's mouths"—from the *Manchester Guardian*. Nor is the danger confined to this "competition." The Oxford motion on King and Country shows another aspect of it. (As does the part played by students in China, for example).

'And so the Spens Report recommends a restriction of Grammar School places—see Conclusion 152, and pp. 319-322. The figure they suggest is *lower* than the average for the years

1936 and 1937. At the same time they recommend the diversion of the demand for higher education into Technical channels.

'The historical sections, by the way, are probably tendentious, and make an interesting comparison with the corresponding sections of the Hadow Report. History in 1939 looks quite different from History in 1926.

'Of course the Report is full of progressive ideas. But these stand very little chance of bearing fruit—*e.g.*, Recommendations 132 (parity of Schools), 135 (teaching establishment), 150 (leaving age 16). Under the cover of these aspirations the drive to make education vocational will go on (*i.e.*, to make higher education for the masses suitable to their station in life).

'One other thing I need say. That is that "on educational grounds" I believe that education for all children between the ages of 11 and 16 should be practical and vocational, rather than academic, liberal and humane. The best age for liberal and humane education is 16 to 22 or older (*i.e.*, Sixth Form and University). "On educational grounds" I agree with most of what the Report says. Were it made in a different social and political context I should not call it reactionary.

'Furthermore I believe that its liberal and progressive professions should be used by all progressive people; that attempts should stubbornly be made to secure the fulfilment of these professions. I think that the Report can be used in two ways—that it is a two-edged sword. But I'm sure which edge is being sharpened in Whitehall.'

The other radically adverse critic writes:

'The Spens Report, it would appear, passes judgment upon itself not only by quoting the following passage with approval, but by taking it as basis for its own recommendations. The passage comes from a Royal Commission which reported in 1895:

"Secondary Education . . . is the education of the boy or girl not simply as a human being who needs to be instructed in the mere rudiments of knowledge, but it is a process of intellectual training and personal discipline conducted with special regard to the profession or trade to be followed . . . All secondary schools . . . in so far as they qualify men for doing something

in life, partake more or less in the character of institutes that educate craftsmen. Every profession, even that of winning scholarships, is a craft, and all crafts are arts. But if Secondary Education be so conceived, it is evident that under it technical instruction is to be comprehended. The two are not indeed identical, but they differ as genus and species, or as general term and particular name, not as genus and genus or as opposed terms. No definition of technical instruction is possible that does not bring it under the head of Secondary Education, nor can Secondary Education be so defined as absolutely to exclude from it the idea of technical instruction. Under the common head there are many species . . . Technical instruction is secondary . . . And secondary instruction is technical, *i.e.*, it teaches the boy so to apply the principles he is learning, and so to learn the principles by applying them, or so to use the instruments he is being made to know, as to perform or to produce something, interpret a literature or a science, make a picture or a book, practise a plastic or a manual art, convince a jury or persuade a senate, translate or annotate an author, dye wool, weave cloth, design or construct a machine, navigate a ship or command an army. Secondary education, therefore, as inclusive of technical, may be described as education conducted in view of the special life that has to be lived with the express purpose of forming a person fit to live it."

'A certain looseness of language is to be noted, suggesting a similar looseness of thought. The term "secondary education," for example, would appear to be used as the name now of a genus, now of a species; and the adjective "technical" as the name now for what differentiates a species from all else under the genus, now for what all the species have in common. "Secondary instruction . . . is technical; technical . . . is secondary"; it would be extremely difficult to decide from all this whether, in the Commission's mind, the genus inclusive of both secondary and technical is itself the one or the other. Strictly speaking of course it is neither; but there might be less impropriety in transferring to it the one rather than the other name. Probably the Commission was content to think of it—or to have a vague "feeling" of it; the word "think" is complimentary—as both; now one, now the other, as the argument demanded. But it is impossible,



if one wishes to be honest in housekeeping, to tell oneself in this way that a cake is both eaten and stored.

' Behind this fumbling there lies the intention to assert that secondary and technical education have something in common. And so they have: nothing however of great importance, if the Commission's arguments are to be judged by. " In so far as they qualify men for doing something in life " there are, it would seem, a vast number of things in the character of which secondary schools might be said to partake: not only of institutes, but of families and churches, of surgeries when teeth ache and of boot-shops when feet are bare. In the accommodating language of the Commission, at least, they might be said to do so " more or less." And as the immediate function of a boot-shop, as far as the customer is concerned, is to facilitate walking—that is, to enable something to be done: it would seem obvious that there is *more* in common between a bootshop and many or perhaps all institutes, than between any institute and the ideal secondary school which, if at the present time nowhere to be found, is easy to be imagined. The immediate function of the latter is to qualify men, not to do anything, but to know and to feel rightly; and so—but only mediately—to do.

' Before being impressed by resemblances discovered between two existents, it is necessary to be convinced of the knowledge and tact—or wisdom or prudence; it is difficult to find, in modern English, a word for the proper combination of right thinking and feeling—of the persons who make the discovery. Otherwise a deal of valuable time may be wasted over moons and green cheeses. Unfortunately it is rather lack of knowledge and taste than the opposite which would seem to have characterized the Commission of 1895; at least, so far as is apparent from the quotations made by the Spens Committee. That they should seize on the winning of scholarships as a representative secondary school activity should perhaps be passed over, for it is a joke; jokes are however not uninformative. And towards the close of the above passage comes a list of human activities, in which in all seriousness the " making of a picture or a book " (the Commission does not, even in this context, recoil from the verb " make ") is ranked alongside the making of textiles or of machines. The implication is clear—or if not, is so from the whole tenor of the Spens Report,

to which doubters must be referred—that the mutual responsibilities and dependences between engineer and society are at least comparable to those between society and author or artist.

‘ It may have been possible to hold this belief in 1895 ; or at any rate to act upon it, without outward circumstances bringing it closely to the question. An obsequious Providence, or the natural evolutionary forces (biologic, economic or—for the higher-minded—merely metaphysic) may have seemed a sufficient guarantee for future, as they had proved of present prosperity. Without any conspicuous aid from at any rate contemporary intellect and conscience, society had been brought to such perfection that it was necessary, not to enquire what jobs were worth doing, but merely to do the many which were to hand. If contemporary conditions required engineers or scholarship winners, then both engineering and scholarship winning were laudable ; at least equally, and possible more so than enquiring why society should require certain things to be done at all ; or seeking in prose or verse to express the effects of doing them upon the human soul. In 1939, however, most people have shared in or witnessed one great war, and four major revolutions which are far from merely political ; a yet greater revolution is at any rate conceivable, and a second war upon us. Society’s demands are no longer clear ; and what would seem to be so is that in the past blind acquiescence in such demands was at least conducive to evil. Yet the Spens Committee assumes that it was not : and, as was said at the beginning, that without consciousness of inadequacy it can confess the optimistic faith of 1895 is its sufficient condemnation.

‘ It would seem a conclusion of unprejudiced common sense that, if man wishes his affairs to prosper, he must himself assume some responsibility for them : must decide that, of the innumerable and varied things he might do, some alone are worth doing, some most worth doing—and try to do the latter. A period of general preparation, of contemplation, that is, is necessary before even preparing for any particular activity ; and it is essential to the well-being of any society, that contemplation should be encouraged and provided for. Tradition of centuries has done this, at least in part—even so not adequately ; but that is a subordinate question—by what was called a *liberal education*. While he was being *liberally educated*, a man was held back from doing this particular

thing or that ; and taught if he were receptive the advantage, if stupid the necessity, of exercising forethought and fore-feeling before committing himself.

' The notion of a *liberal education* is as a red rag to both Spens Committee and Commission of 1895 ; hence their desire to assimilate secondary schools where, however feebly, its inspiration has been preserved, to technical schools where from the first that inspiration has been scouted. They wish to put everybody in the street straightaway, and to set them walking. If opposed both to common sense and to tradition, as has been suggested, this wish is unnatural ; all the more important therefore that it should be recognized and if possible understood, as a contemporary phenomenon to be combated.

' The Commission of 1895 seems to have had extremely unfortunate examples of liberal education before it. Schools which taught classics, it said, *might* be as little liberal as those which gave instruction in a practical art ; modern literature *might* be made " a field for as narrow and technical a drill as the most formal science." Of course they *might*, and of course they *have* : complaints of this kind have nowhere been made with more frequency than in *Scrutiny*—*Scrutiny* however has not, with the Commission, assumed that they *must* be so. And in that it has the support both of logic and of tradition. As for the Spens Committee, on this point, had it known or wished, it might have referred not only to tradition, but to recent and even contemporary practice. But *nous sommes des orfèvres* : and there is a second ground on which to criticize without offending modesty.

' The Commission writes, and presumably the Committee agrees, that " education inevitably becomes more and more practical, a means of forming men, not simply to enjoy life, but to accomplish something in the life they enjoy." The education described as " forming men . . . simply to enjoy life " is, it should be explained, the liberal. But if so, then even if it were successful, obviously it would not be desirable ; it would indeed be the most undesirable education of all. And a sufficient answer would seem to be that it cannot be so : that human nature and the human situation forbid that, when a man is not being " practical," he should inevitably be " enjoying himself." Rather, as has been seen, it is desirable that, before being practical, he should engage on

strenuous intellectual and emotional activity. The Committee and Commission might as well suggest that, if a man is not walking down the street, he is inevitably day-dreaming ; whereas it is at least possible, he should ponder, from time to time, where he is going to go.

' It is melancholy to reflect that, in thus endorsing the opinions of 1895, the Committee is faithfully reflecting and thereby strongly encouraging, the vulgar superstitions of to-day. The vast majority of our contemporaries are compelled to lead a life in which there is a hard and fast division, as the Americans put it, between work and whoopee ; the more articulate among them seek to persuade others, no doubt, also to persuade themselves, that this division is right, proper and founded in nature. They give up hope of rescuing out of a barren isolation the two halves of life which, if they could be brought together, might be immeasurably fruitful. And thus there is established as ideal an existence which consists of clerking on weekdays, golfing on Sundays ; visits to the city during the week, during the week-end to Brighton. Obviously the Committee has been so captivated by this ideal as (following the Commission) to project it into the past: they assume that, when the eighteenth century, the Renaissance or even the mediæval scholar read his classics, he was undertaking nothing more than a trip to Brighton—an intellectual Brighton, of course, well cleaned and well policed, but still a Brighton. The eighteenth-century scholar might smile at this description of himself, and admit its partial justice ; the scholar of the Renaissance on the other hand would have ready his oaths, the scholar of the Middle Ages his prayers.

' Behind all this there would seem to be a nineteenth-century distrust or rather scorn of the intellect. Prosperity rots the intellectual fibres ; not having need to think, the nineteenth century and its successors neglected and finally refused to do so. As has been said, they rely upon natural forces, imagined as having brought them to their present state, to preserve and with a gradual inevitableness to improve it. If everyday experience, or the experience of ages shown in history, suggests that it may be unwise to do so, then experience and history are wrong. The nineteenth was the most unhistorical of centuries: willingly it referred only to Hellas as its ancestor—but its Hellas was a fiction, and it

neglected entirely the Middle Ages. So does the Spens Committee, with the addition of renouncing Hellas. That it renounces tradition has been mentioned more than once.

Its most remarkable incursions into history are those by which it seeks, not only to foist its idea of liberal education on the past, but to cite the past as witness to its ideas. The only education worthy the name says the Committee, is practical, vocational ; but the Middle Ages believed in this because schools and universities were only for priests, lawyers, or doctors. As is well known, priests have a vocation. Similar in a later century academies were established to train boys and youths to be gentlemen : to be a gentleman however is a vocation. But this is mere punning, and would be beneath notice in a document from another source.

' Once again it is melancholy to notice the Committee submitted to and conspiring with the dangerous prejudices of to-day. People are only too ready to believe that all occupations are of equal dignity : a poet with a pastry cook, a scholar, unless he makes more money, with a stockbroker, and as obviously he makes less, people are only too anxious to be stockbrokers or cooks. The Committee goes near to offering them the opportunity of being so, while at the same time persuading themselves that *ipso facto* they are educated.

' Distrust of the intellect might be illustrated time and time again : as for example from a section which, as it is of subordinate importance to this notice, has not yet been touched upon. Among its detailed recommendations upon teaching the Committee writes : " The history of Greece and Rome and the conceptions which they gave to the world retain immense importance for the understanding of the modern world." The conceptions of the intellect, it would seem, are given a very deep bow. However, the Committee goes on : " . . . but, save as these conceptions have been interpreted in the thought of later times or are embodied in existing institutions, they are less widely relevant than, for example, recent history . . . " and now it becomes apparent that the bow is no more than a ceremonious one. For if it really believed in the immense importance of certain conceptions, the Committee would also believe that it was of an importance equally immense for a pupil to disengage them as soon as possible. And he would do so if they were presented in an unfamiliar setting : the very multitude of contrasts between

ancient Rome, for example, and modern London drawing attention to the essentials which they have in common. But if on the other hand the Committee doubts whether intellectual conceptions are of great use in history ; whether it is as true to say that political or social ideals are striven for or abandoned, as that one age mechanically or naturally develops into the next : then of course it will, as here, seek to concentrate attention on what lies nearest to itself. It will have the hope—a feeble one, but it will have no other—that having divined how to-day developed out of yesterday, it will be able to prophesy how to-morrow is to develop out of to-day. And this is in fact the explanation of what the Committee recommends.

‘Again in a footnote on “the course of philosophy in the highest classes of French *lycées*,” the Committee remarks that “one may regret the great English classics, such as the philosophical writings of Locke, Berkeley and Hume, should be commended to the attention of French schoolboys, and yet be scarcely known in English schools.” Nevertheless, it continues, “we must agree that the English schoolmaster has shown a sound comprehension of his pupils’ needs in not introducing them to studies that demand maturity for their due appreciation.” Either the English pupils’ needs differ widely from those of the French, or the French schoolmaster is being accused of over-haste. Yet it would be dangerous to condemn him as a failure. In fact the Committee, like many contemporaries, cherish the notion that as Englishmen are by nature unintellectual, they may be excused the labour of being so. Would Englishmen of the eighteenth or a preceding century have pleaded thus? The maturity of the French *lycéen* compared with an English schoolboy has often been noticed, and attributed to a host of causes : climate, physique and what not. It would be interesting to speculate how much of it is due to the philosophy course now under discussion, and to all that it stands for. The atmosphere of a *lycée* is more mature than that of a secondary school : there the professor implies and the pupil acknowledges what is rarely acknowledged or understood in England—that it is not only possible but desirable for the intellect to play a part in the conduct of life.

‘The first criticism in this notice was of the Committee for neglecting, or for approving the neglect, of elementary rules of

logic ; a similar criticism may prepare its close, now that a kindred topic has emerged. On the subject of academic freedom the Committee hopes that England, unlike other countries, will not seek to " regiment " either schools or pupils. For, they say, they " find it impossible to believe that a community . . . has not everything to gain from the free growth of individuality among its potential citizens." Now if *individuality* means anything it means the substance of an individual—of the man A, the man B, the man C, and so on. And according to substance there is no growth : except in a figurative sense, the man A can never hope to be more of A than he is at this moment, nor the man B more of B . . . any more than a cow, by existing a vast number of years or by any other means, will ever augment its cow-ness. The man A can hope to grow, not into more of A, but only into more of a father or more of a teacher, the man B into more of a son or more of a citizen . . . can hope to grow, that is, only according to his qualities. And once this is realized, it is also realized that to talk of " free growth " as necessarily beneficial is absurd : for qualities are general and not particular to any man, and if a man would grow into them it is to them he must conform. They will not conform to him. It is impossible to be a good citizen, a good teacher, a good son, even a good father without being regimented, that is to say without conforming, in some degree. Yet it is impossible to be a civilized individual without being one or more of these ; and what therefore the Committee hope for—or otherwise they should not be at all concerned for schools, and should recommend the opening of gaols and of asylums—can only be that regimentation should not be irksome as elsewhere. To define its degrees and kinds would be an exhausting task, which the Committee cannot be blamed for refusing ; it should not however seek to hide refusal behind offensive *clichés*—meaningless at best, and at worst misleading.

‘ Because of its reluctance to engage on intellectual distinctions the Committee was from the first doomed to failure in its difficult discussion of *liberal education*. For without doubt the discussion is far more difficult now than in any former age : in which, as has been hinted, a liberal education was only one of the opportunities provided for self-preparation and for contemplation. It affected no more than a small number of persons, those who,

among other things, might as statesmen, lawyers or priests, conceivably be called upon to guide society through unforeseen contingencies. The majority, or at least a significant number of the rest, for whom society was stable, were taught to prepare themselves and to contemplate first in the family and home, and secondly in the fields or workshop. All these were respected institutions, within which it was possible to lead a satisfactory life. The quality of living open to farmers or craftsmen, rooted in their small town, village or countryside, has often been written upon in *Scrutiny*. Workshop, farm and often home were however destroyed in the industrial revolution, to be replaced by the factory and the elementary school.

‘The tradition of a liberal education was thus deprived of what might be called a tradition of liberal training, which had been its main supposition and support. In the resulting isolation it was exposed at best to misunderstanding, at worst to envy ; of late it has been exposed also to infection. For the elementary has spilled over in to the secondary school ; divergent aims have in consequence been pursued within the latter, have thwarted one another, and there has been waste of money and effort. It is true that, in the present situation, there is very little to be approved ; in refusing vigorously to do so, the Spens Committee renders a great service.

‘Its remedies however will be worse than the disease. For the technical school or institute it hopes to multiply will, no more than the elementary school, satisfactorily replace the workshop and the home ; and further, in order to multiply this useless thing it is willing to sacrifice what is still conceivably of value—the remains of a liberal tradition in our schools.’

It remains to thank the contributors for their collaboration.



# THE AMERICAN CULTURAL SCENE

## (III) EDUCATION

THE people of the United States have always regarded public education as one of the most important responsibilities of society. Harvard was founded in 1636, six years after the colonization of Massachusetts ; and by 1776 there were already in existence, in different parts of the country, seven other colleges of university rank. A public school system providing for universal free education was from the beginning the programme of New England and of the western states which were colonized after the Revolution, and had become a reality everywhere except in the South before the Civil War. The accepted ideal (to quote from the constitution of the State of Iowa, as drafted in 1846) was ' a general system of education, ascending in regular gradation from township high schools to a State University, where tuition shall be gratis and equally open to all.'

At the present day (in spite of considerable differences between the educational facilities of wealthy states such as New York and California and those of the poverty-stricken South) the physical manifestations of this faith in education are numerous and impressive. There are twenty-two million seven hundred thousand pupils in elementary schools, and six million four hundred thousand in high schools ; of children between the ages of five and seventeen, eighty-four per cent. are attending school. There are eight hundred and seventy thousand school teachers ; and the money spent on education by public bodies averages nearly seventy-five dollars a year for each pupil. There are nearly one thousand colleges and universities, of which eighty-two have enrolments of more than two thousand five hundred, and the faculties of which total nearly on hundred thousand. The total number of undergraduates is more than one million two hundred thousand ; the money spent each year on higher education is nearly five hundred million dollars ; and the

total value of the endowments and properties of colleges and universities approaches four thousand million dollars. By comparison with the equivalent statistics for any other country in the world, such figures seem almost astronomical.

That the American educational system can be considered as successful would not, however, be maintained by any disinterested observer. It has, by contrast with that of Great Britain, the inestimable advantage of being democratic ; the overwhelming majority of the population pass through the same public school system, and private schools (corresponding to the public schools of Great Britain) are relatively few and lacking in prestige. But there is no doubt that there has been a considerable levelling-down as well as a levelling-up, that the enormous quantitative development has been accompanied by a considerable sacrifice of quality, and that the standards of the average American secondary school and university are lower than those of their European equivalents. To some extent this situation is the result of factors which are peculiar to the United States—to immigration, for example, which has meant that for a considerable percentage of the population English has been a foreign language. But to a large degree the problems of American education are problems which are inherent in a democracy and which, though more acute in America than elsewhere, have a general significance. They are the problems of maintaining high cultural standards in a society which is dominated by egalitarian ideals, and of preserving respect for a liberal education when it is no longer a badge of class supremacy and has no obvious economic utility. An educational system cannot be healthy and vigorous unless it is visibly performing a necessary social function. The only functions which are generally expected of the American system are to inculcate respect for American traditions and to provide specialized training for the professions. The best American professional schools, particularly those of law and medicine, are at least as good as any which can be found in Europe. But in so far as American schools and colleges attempt to provide a genuinely liberal education, they encounter considerable difficulties.

During the colonial period the American colleges had the social function of providing the Protestant churches with a learned ministry and—in the South—of imparting the culture appropriate

to a land-owning aristocracy. The curriculum, as in Europe, consisted mainly of Latin and Greek—a study which, in spite of its narrowness, did at least involve direct exposure to a number of great books and not merely the acquisition of factual information from text-books. The excellence of colonial higher education is proved by its fruits. When one contrasts the group of men who took the lead in the foundation of the American republic with the generations who came after them, it is difficult not to feel that throughout the nineteenth century there was a steady degeneration with respect to all those qualities which can be regarded as the fruits of a liberal education.

The classics continued to be the centre of the college curriculum until after the Civil War ; but with the decline of clerical influence and the decay of aristocracy this kind of education lost its social utility, and the result was a decrease in the number of college students. In the eighteen-seventies, however, higher education began to be revitalized. The growing public school system was now establishing contact with the university system. There was a rapid increase of public secondary schools, which bridged the gap between the elementary school and the college, and which made a university education possible for anybody who was not of below-average intelligence and who could obtain money for his living expenses as an undergraduate. The growth of industry was creating millionaires who were only too willing to have their names commemorated through lavish endowments for higher education. Meanwhile the university curriculum and methods of instruction were being drastically revised by a group of university presidents (who, under the American system, hold office permanently and have almost autocratic powers), of whom President Eliot of Harvard was the most influential. Eliot destroyed the supremacy of the classics, introduced into the curriculum a great variety of modern subjects, made the professional schools a vital part of the university, and instituted the ' elective ' system, under which the undergraduate was allowed considerable freedom to choose those subjects which appealed to him. Eliot's reforms were adopted, to a greater or less degree, by every large university in the country ; and their general acceptance, which made higher education both more democratic and more utilitarian, was followed by an enormous growth in college enrolments. The number of college students

more than doubled between 1900 and 1920, and doubled again between 1920 and 1930 ; while during the same thirty-year period high school enrolment increased from seven hundred thousand to six and a half million.

A normal education now consists of eight years in an elementary school, followed by four years in a high school. A considerable proportion of the population then passes on to the universities, many of which, being supported by states or municipalities, are free, and entrance to which is open to anybody whose high school record has been satisfactory. After four years in a university the student can further prolong his educational career by spending one or more years acquiring a higher degree in a graduate school or by entering one of the professional schools. Under the elective system graduation is dependent upon the accumulation of a certain number of units of study which are counted as of equal value—a conception which has obvious affinities with the building of machines out of interchangeable parts in American mass-production industry. A satisfactory high school record means that a certain number of ' credits ' have been obtained for a certain number of different subjects. University graduation means the accumulation of one hundred and twenty points, which (except that a few courses, such as English composition and European history, are compulsory, and that about a quarter of the points must be concentrated on a particular field of study, known as a ' major ') can be distributed among different subjects pretty much as the undergraduate pleases. A course which meets three times a week for half a year has a value of three points, and a student who (in the opinion of the instructor giving the course) has passed it satisfactorily will add the three points to his total score. Under this system there are no comprehensive examinations, undergraduates are encouraged to acquire a smattering of knowledge in a very varied range of subjects, and those ' snap ' courses the instructors of which are known to require little work are apt to attract enormous enrolments.

To what extent this system provides anything which may be called an education is—to put it mildly—dubious. In proportion as the educational ladder has become longer, its standards have become lower ; so that a large part of the university course is devoted to acquiring general information which—in European countries—belongs in the secondary schools. Higher education

ought probably to consist chiefly of intensive study of a particular field ; and in the United States such study begins only upon entry into a graduate or professional school. The vast growth of educational facilities in the 'twenties was, moreover, accompanied by an increasing emphasis on non-academic activities. Most of the major universities gathered round them an infinite variety of commercial and technical studies ; university presidents devoted themselves primarily to lavish and elaborate building programmes ; university and high school athletics acquired the proportions and the psychology of a big business, and their star performers the prestige of cinema actors ; and—in the words of Woodrow Wilson—the side-shows began to swallow up the circus.

The onset of the depression marked, however, a very healthy turning-point in higher education, as it did in almost every other aspect of American cultural activity. The 'thirties have seen a general reaction against the mass-production bargain-basement tendencies of the elective system and an increasing number of attempts to restore the old ideals of liberal education. One of the earliest symptoms of the change was the publication in 1930 of Abraham Flexner's *Universities American English German*, which exposed the corruption of standards in America and offered for imitation the German system. And though subsequent events have suggested that Mr. Flexner's praise of the German system must have been exaggerated, his startling revelations of the manner in which cultural ideals were being degraded in America have had a very salutary influence. During the 'thirties there has been a general tendency to abandon the elective system, with Harvard—once again—leading the way. A growing number of universities are now requiring that undergraduates should pursue a single integrated course of study instead of gathering their one hundred and twenty points by wandering at their own sweet will among all the hundreds of courses listed in the college catalogue, are requiring that graduation should be dependent on passing a final comprehensive examination, and are attempting to replace the supremacy of the lecture system, with its lack of personal contact between instructor and undergraduate, by a tutorial system.

The general tendency of the reforms has been towards transplanting the Oxford and Cambridge system into America—a tendency which is at least partly due to the influence of Rhodes

Scholars. Other reformers, however, favour more drastic methods. The chief storm centre in American education is, at present, President Hutchins of Chicago, who has provoked violent controversies not so much by the changes introduced into his own university, which are largely an adaptation of the English system, as by his public pronouncements. President Hutchins and his closest associate, Professor Mortimer Adler, have proclaimed that education ought to pay less attention to the acquisition of scientific information and more attention to the inculcation of the basic philosophical principles underlying clear thinking and wise activity ; that the cardinal task of education is to teach people to think, read and write (which, as President Hutchins likes to point out, was the purpose of the mediæval trivium) and that this task is very rarely fulfilled ; and that the best kind of education is the direct and intensive study of the classics, literary philosophical and scientific, of the European cultural tradition. The controversy provoked by these very salutary doctrines has been somewhat confused by the admiration professed by Hutchins and Adler for the philosophy of Aristotle and St. Thomas and by their criticisms of the pretensions of modern science ; and (although neither Hutchins nor Adler is a Catholic) these philosophical proclivities are regarded by many liberals as politically suspect and as indicating, in general, a desire to return to the Middle Ages. Hutchins's ideas are at present being tried out in a small Maryland college, St. John's, under the leadership of Stringfellow Barr as president and Scott Buchanan as dean. The curriculum in this college now consists primarily of the intensive study of one hundred and twenty European classics (in which are included mathematical and scientific works as well as literature and philosophy, and which, incidentally, is combined with more laboratory work than is customary in American colleges).

American small colleges, being privately-endowed and free from political control, provide admirable opportunities for educational experiments ; and there are a large number which are attempting to work out remedies for the deficiencies of the larger institutions, varying from such relatively conservative institutions as Swarthmore in Pennsylvania, which concentrate on providing a good liberal education on the European model, to radical colleges like Antioch in Ohio and Black Mountain in North Carolina,

which aim at curing the isolation of academic life by integrating study with work in industry and agriculture. The best-known of the experimental colleges, however, is perhaps Bennington in Vermont, which is restricted to women. Bennington has done away altogether with lectures and examinations, and very nearly with rules and regulations. Students, who are carefully selected and are asked to leave whenever they do not appear to be using their freedom profitably, work individually under the supervision of a faculty which has itself been chosen with unusual care.

In spite, however, of the value of these experiments in higher education, they scarcely touch the real problems, which are much more fundamental. The colleges cannot improve beyond a certain point unless they receive better material from the high schools ; and in the high schools, which are controlled by state and municipal governments, the difficulties of improvement are much greater. The belief that each child has an equal right to an education usually means, in practice, that little is done to segregate or encourage those of above-average ability, and that the pace of each school group is the pace of the slowest members of it. The principles and practices of public school system are, moreover, largely determined by the professional Schools of Education, which have had a very rapid growth during the twentieth century, which have evolved a most extraordinary and pretentious psychology jargon for the description of the simplest mental operations, and which specialize not in teaching literature or science but in teaching how to teach them (an educational discovery which appears to be capable of being extended almost indefinitely). And while it would perhaps be an exaggeration to say that all the time which every would-be teacher is required to spend in a School of Education is completely wasted, it would appear that persons of intelligence learn nothing in these institutions which they do not know already, and that whatever sound information they may impart is more than counterbalanced by the mental confusion caused by the jargon in which they impart it. The liaisons established between the Schools of Education and the public educational authorities have given them, nevertheless, a privileged position (there are at present more than two hundred thousand students enrolled in these institutions).

Still more significant is the problem of how a liberal education can retain its proper place at the heart of the educational system

when it has ceased to have any direct economic or social utility. The best products of the English universities tend to become either civil servants or school masters ; and both these professions require a broad cultural education. In the United States, on the other hand, entrance into the civil service is based on narrowly technical qualifications, and both the civil service and school-teaching have relatively little prestige. A large majority of the graduates of the leading American universities either become business men or go to a professional school ; and for such persons the economic value of a university career consists primarily in its social contacts rather than in anything learnt in classrooms. The result is that relatively few university students have any reason for regarding non-technical education as a serious matter, and that the old liberal arts college is in danger of becoming partly an extension of the high school and partly a preparation for the professional school and of losing any character of its own. Ideally, the importance of a liberal education should be obvious enough to enable it to retain its prestige on its own merits ; unfortunately the number of persons who want education for its own sake and not for its incidental economic utility appears to be scarcely large enough to justify any such ideal conclusion.

H. B. PARKES.



## THE TRAGEDY OF BLOOD

AS you will gather, this paper has been put together in a very few days.<sup>1</sup> This must be my excuse for its misleading title.

I had hoped to be able to say something about the Tragedy of Blood in general, but found on examination that my ideas were not so definite as I had assumed. I must, I am afraid, ask you to concentrate your attention on a narrower subject: on a single exponent of the Tragedy of Blood, John Webster; and at least for the greater part of our time on a single play of his, *The White Devil*.

Webster, like many or perhaps most of the Elizabethans, has been over-praised; more certainly and more dangerously he has been praised for the wrong reasons. In consequence there has developed a tendency either to praise him not at all, or to under-praise; and conflicts have arisen, mistaken, I think, on both sides, by which possibly right reasons for praise have been obscured.

For example, both his detractors and his admirers agree that he lacks constructive ability. His poetry, say the latter, is a poetry of flashes, of fragments; such a poetry, reply the former, is not poetry at all—or at any rate it is not dramatic poetry. Both I would say repose a very generous trust in general principles of criticism; whereas the matter of literature is of such variety that, unless general principles are continually tested and supplemented, they are as likely as not to mislead. Before allowing that Webster cannot construct, his admirers should perhaps consider whether the type of construction in which obviously he fails—in which dramatic tension is gradually increased through a number of acts, then decreased more swiftly but still gradually—whether this type of construction, though common, is the only type possible; and whether it is a type which, in *The White Devil*, he even attempted. And on the other hand the detractors should perhaps ask themselves whether, whatever the precision and homogeneity to be predicated of an ideal drama or poem—in which no word would be super-

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<sup>1</sup>A paper read to the Doughty Society, Downing College.

fluous, and no phrase in the slightest degree either above or below its context—human imbecillity allows this precision to be realized in a work of any length. If not, then in Webster's work it is important to consider not the fact that, but the degree to which, it contains inequalities. For this may not be so great as to prevent it being effective as an artistic—a poetic, a dramatic—whole.

Whether or not it is so can of course be decided only by reading it. In the rest of this paper I shall endeavour to explain why, after reading *The White Devil*, I think that it is so. Or at least that is what I shall try to do in part: for I shall be able to treat only the first of the above questions, about the play's construction. In any case this is what needs to be considered first: to those who, neglecting it, hasten (as is quite likely) to decide that defects outweigh excellencies in Webster's verse I can only say that the excellencies are undoubtedly great; and perhaps more easily under-estimated than the defects are ignored.

The opening of the play has often been noted for its abruptness; but has, I think, other qualities worthy of attention. Lodovico is announcing that he has been banished, Antonelli and Gasparo are condoling with him:

LOD. Banisht. ANT. It greev'd me much to heare the sentence.  
 LOD. Ha, Ha, ô *Democritus* thy Gods  
 That governe the whole world. Courtly reward  
 And punishment. Fortun's a right whore.  
 If she give ought, she deales it in smal percells,  
 That she may take away all at one swoope.  
 This tis to have great enemies, God quite them:  
 Your wolfe no longer seems to be a wolfe  
 Than when shees hungry.

Lodovico is moved: so much is obvious from the substance of his sentences. But also their brevity, and an emphasis which they acquire either by straddling the pentameter or by filling it to the point, suggest that this emotion is not beyond control and will lead to action. To what kind of action? for Ludovico contradicts himself. He pours scorn on the gods while at the same time he invokes their aid; his enemy he considers to be now Fortune which is capricious, now great men who are malevolent; the latter he

hints are both hungry and satiate ; contemptible by nature (for they are wolves), but enviable for what they have been able to achieve. The contradictions are the more obvious because conjunctions are few ; and the sentences—this is an unusual connection or lack of connection between them—seem not so much to follow and resume, as to qualify or comment on one another as they lie side by side. It must I think be allowed that they do so ; and the speech in consequence taken not so much as an account of Ludovico as a piece of acting or material for such an account. This the reader must draft for himself, as it is not supplied from the stage.

What then is the account to be? As Ludovico appears both to believe and to disbelieve in order, whether human or divine, it is tempting to dismiss him as merely incoherent. But if he were so, he would be incapable of speech and action ; and of these the first is unlikely to be true, the second impossible. It may, I think, be nearer the truth that he realizes only faintly the nature and consequences of action, speech or belief ; and that, for the sake of saying or doing something, he is willing to adopt, not insincerely but ignorantly, any and any number of scraps of beliefs. His mind is disorderly, while at the same time it is decisive, and this is perhaps what his manner of speech is intended to convey : as the separate sentences fall on the ear they are decisive, they appear disorderly as they seek to fit into a whole.

Qualities of this kind are at any rate of sufficient importance for Webster to bring them into prominence by a contrast. The dialogue between Antonelli and Gasparo which immediately follows is so orderly as at first sight to appear mechanical ; and so feeble as to be bathetic at what, again at first sight, appears its climax :

ANT. Come my Lord,  
You are justly dom'd ; looke but a little backe  
Into your former life: you have in three yeares  
Ruin'd the noblest Earldome. GAS. Your followers  
Have swallowed you like Mummia, and being sicke  
With such unnaturall and horrid Phisicke  
Vomit you up ith kennell. ANT. All the damnable degrees  
Of drinkings have you, you staggerd through—one Citizen  
Is Lord of two faire Manors cald you master,  
Only for Caviare. GAS. Those noblemen

Which were invited to your prodigall feastes,  
 Wherein the Phænix scarce could scape your throtes,  
 Laugh at your misery . . .  
 . . . Worse than these,  
 You have acted certaine Murders here in Rome,  
 Bloody and full of horror.

The speeches begin and end in the middle of a line, and a seesaw-like balance is immediately obvious about them. The lines about murder could hardly be more perfunctory.

The dialogue has however positive qualities, and its function is not merely to be a foil to Ludovico. It would, I think, be as true to say that the latter's speech is foil to the dialogue: for as do the sentences within the speech, the two lie side by side commenting upon and qualifying one another. Once again the spectator is required to judge not so much between statements, as to base a judgment upon a group of them.

Antonelli and Gasparo speak of justice, which is a principle of order. Their justice is however of a peculiar kind, according to which extravagance and gluttony are less serious than murder. As has been said, murder is mentioned only perfunctorily; it is also last in the dialogue; while extravagance and gluttony which precede it are, on the other hand, not inadequately described. That Antonelli and Gasparo believe in a justice of this kind should not perhaps be suspected, even for a moment; but if so, it is necessary only to glance at their descriptions. If these hint at any feeling at all—and I think they do—it is at approval of what they professedly condemn. Behind imitations of a drunkard's voice and gait,

. . . All the damnable degrees  
 Of drinkings have you, you staggerd through . . .

it is difficult not to be aware of complacency; behind the verse about

. . . prodigall feastes  
 Wherein the Phænix scarce could scape your throtes . . .

of envy and admiration. Gasparo's and Antonelli's parade of the word justice, it seems clear, is mere hypocrisy.

They are mocking rather than rebuking Ludovico ; or if they rebuke him at all, it is for not being sufficiently hypocritical as they are. To be sure of future indulgence, vice needs to take account both of public opinion and of its own resources. The former cannot be persistently outraged ; the latter, by a man in Ludovico's station, need to be husbanded. As he has indulged too early and too often, he is rightly a subject to 'jest upon.' The dialogue is an artifice—hence its artificial structure ; and by it the speakers intend that artifice shall be recommended. It shall be so by veiled precept, but still more by open example.

Ludovico however will not learn. His eyes, unaccustomed to the future, do not seize any of the benefits in the way of licence likely to flow from present constraint. The latter appears not prudence but affectation ; and in an aside to the audience he ridicules Gasparo and Antonelli's way of speaking :

This Well goes with two buckets, I must tend  
The powring out of eather.

Later, when the affectation reaches its height in the lines about murder :

You have acted certaine Murders here in Rome  
Bloody and full or horror,

his ridicule comes into the open. 'Las,' he replies, 'they were fleabytinges,' presenting Antonelli and Gasparo with a more adequate expression of their common views.

But he is not, I think, rebuking them for hypocrisy, any more than they have rebuked him. If he is the more sympathetic as he is the simpler character, he is not the more virtuous ; and any attempt to sympathize with him wholly or even to a marked degree would be to misread the scene. The mystifications and accommodations paraded by Antonelli and Gasparo get in his way as a man of action ; they discredit action on which he has been engaged in the past : impatiently therefore—but no more than impatiently ; certainly not in the interests of virtue—he brushes them aside.

I hope it will not appear I am refining too much on a small part of a comparatively unimportant scene. A tradition of some strength has to be broken : if it cannot be said that the scene and

the play as a whole has received insufficient, it has received the wrong kind of attention. On the one hand, the romantically inclined have read into it admiration for Ludovico's precipitancy, which accordingly they have called courage or heroism ; the post-romantics on the other, rightly rejecting these as of no value, have concluded that there is no reference whatever to values in the play. Nor indeed in the whole of Webster ; whose work therefore is negligible. Whereas the truth, I am suggesting, would seem to be that here at any rate by opposing two negative values in such a way that neither dominates nor obscures the other ; that, like the sentences and the speeches we have considered, they continue side by side ; a pointed reference to positives is made. Antonelli and Gasparo rebuke Ludovico for his brutish lack of prudence ; he them, for their diabolic cunning. And thus, by something it would not be improper to call construction, standards are introduced into the picture of a world of evil ; though as yet there is no one in it who illustrates them by his actions or his words.

These deductions based on a few opening lines might I think be confirmed from other parts of the play. Throughout Ludovico shows himself to be a creature of impulses ; clear-headed enough for these to be followed with success, not for them to be compared one against the other and if need be suppressed.

Instruction to thee,  
says Monticelso,

Comes like sweet showers to overhardned ground ;  
They wet, but peirce not deepe.

He falls in love with the Duchess, or rather ' pursues her with hot lust ' ; if Webster gives no warning of this, that I think is due not to his oversight, but to the nature of his theme. Upon the Duchess's death Ludovico swears to avenge her. And if Monticelso's refusal of support causes him for a moment to hesitate, a single sign of approval, or what he takes for such, precipitates him upon his course once again. Francisco easily makes him a devoted tool ; and at the end of the play the sight of his vengeance so fills him that he can admit the possibility of no other sensation :

The racke, the gallowes, and the torturing wheele  
Shall be but sound sleepes to me, here's my rest—  
I limb'd this night-peece and it was my best.

Here there is both intellectual and physical insensibility ; not as in a hero or martyr a triumph of intellect or morals over sense. Antonelli and Gasparo on the other hand are deemed worthy to be Francisco's accomplices, Antonelli at least saving his skin. But the clearest confirmation of what I have been trying to say is perhaps to be found in that part of the first scene not yet dealt with.

Its function, let me premiss, is to prepare the background against which, during the second scene, the principal characters are to appear. To use a common metaphor, the atmosphere is to be created in which they breathe. And if what has been said is at all true, this is done rather by actions than by words: Ludovico first executes a movement, then Antonelli and Gasparo—the reader being left to a very large extent to draw his own conclusions. In the opening lines the movements are comparatively sober, as if to establish that they are possible or likely in men. Webster wishes it to be clear that the subject he is portraying and criticizing is humanity. Afterwards it is open to him to make clearer what his criticism is to be. The movements are exaggerated, approaching near to caricature ; or, to keep within terms of the drama, to what Mr. Eliot in writing of *The Jew of Malta* called farce. After gossip which reveals to the audience that Brachiano pursues ' by close panderism . . . the honour of Vittoria Corombona ' Antonelli continues :

Have a full man within you,  
Wee see that Trees beare no such pleasant fruite  
There where they grew first, as where they are new set :  
Perfumes the more they are chaf'd the more they render  
Their pleasing sents, and so affliction  
Expresseth vertue, fully, whether trew  
Or ells adulterate.

This note is familiar from other plays: it is that of ' For though the Camomile, the more it is trodden on, the faster it grows . . . ' But whereas Falstaff does not expect to be taken seriously when he talks in this way, Antonelli and Gasparo are unprepared for Ludovico's gibe :

. . . Leave your painted comforts,  
Ile make Italian cut-works in their guts  
If ever I returne.

Their sole rejoinder is however an 'O sir!' ; it is their manners rather than their morals which Ludovico has outraged.

As the two sets of rogues leave the stage, Ludovico hopes for a quick death, advising Antonelli and Gasparo to make ready against a similar necessity. But they are so far from fearing it that they offer aid for his future plans. Thus they part, in spite of divergence in evil expressing mutual esteem ; but, as has been said, this divergence and esteem are intended to rouse the audience to their common condemnation.

## II.

In Scene II the principles of construction suggested by Scene I are employed for the ordering and presentation of far more important matter. The great Duke of Brachiano, of whom passing mention has already been made, is introduced in person, and with him the principal characters.

He is surrounded by the paraphernalia of greatness—coaches, train and lights. But he has no sooner summoned his confidant and, out of the midst of these, seized opportunity to whisper : BRACH. *Flamineo*. FLAM. My lord. BRACH. Quite lost, *Flamineo* than they are dismissed. In the play he is to sacrifice greatness to his passion.

The dialogue which follows is of the kind now familiar. The two speakers, in far from perfect sympathy one with another, are as far from perfect communication ; neither gives himself a fair account of the other, and both need therefore to be read with equal attention. Only in that way is it possible to know what Webster thought of them, and what he intended the reader to think. On the one hand Brachiano continues the train of reflections, imprecise on the whole but in so far as it is otherwise by no means discreditable, suggested by his 'Quite lost.' This exclamation was one rather of love, if unlawful love, than of lust ; of self-abandonment to another, than of self-assertion at another's expense. Accordingly, to Flamineo's news that Vittoria awaits him, Brachiano replies :

Are wee so happy?

and again, a few minutes later,

Wee are happie above thought, because 'bove merrit.



Then prudence or conscience begins to disturb him :

O but her jealous husband.

Finally this reminder of obstacles in the way of his passion rouses the fear that it may not be satisfied :

\* O, should she faile to come—

While at the same time Flamineo pours forth a torrent of reflections on the lasciviousness of women, the imbecility of husbands, the vanity of love.

It has been objected to both Webster and Flamineo that the reflections are not new. This is true, but not therefore a fault. For Brachiano's incipient passion is a difficult problem : in so far as it inclines to vice and lust Flamineo welcomes it, as it promises a hold upon Brachiano ; love and virtue on the other hand must loosen that hold perhaps even remove it if conscience, as it has begun, continues stirring. So he has to encourage the passion, and at the same time to degrade it. One way, the most obvious and perhaps the only way, is by assimilating it to the subjects of commonplace conversation, indecent and otherwise : things sanctioned or commanded by custom, but rendered at the same time sordid and contemptible.

The dialogue at cross-purposes, Flamineo deliberately ignoring the possibly higher purposes of Brachiano, thus serves to indicate a judgment on Flamineo ; but Brachiano is also judged, in that he sees nothing incongruous in choosing Flamineo as confidant. The indecent commonplaces do not startle him into attention ; they would not seem new to him—what is new is his passion, so new that he does not know how to handle it. He would be the predestined victim of Flamineo were not Vittoria—who is however another evil—at hand.

If we pause for a moment to look ahead, it will, I think, be seen that throughout the play Brachiano is characterized either by hesitancy and hebetude, as now, or by what naturally succeeds them in a mind, blindness and obstinacy. It is Vittoria who operates the change. When at length introduced into her presence, his first speech is a confession of inarticulacy :

Let me into your bosome happy Ladie,  
Powre out instead of eloquence my vows.

She replies with mockery that is scarcely veiled :

Sir, in the way of pitie  
I wish you hart-hole . . .  
Sure Sir a loathed crueltie in Ladyes  
Is as to Doctors many funerals:  
It takes away their credit.

Nevertheless her answer has assured him that he is articulate to some degree ; she has acknowledged his passion, given him confidence in himself ; he is overwhelmed with gratitude, he is hers from that moment. He can be jealous of her, as a possible object of another man's veneration ; but that there is anything about her which should not be venerated, he obstinately refuses to admit. Though he has shared her crimes, for him she remains a ' good woman ' to the end. He shares her shame in the public court, for her sake he defies Grand Duke and Pope. He begins to defy even Flamineo ; but that is too late, when a common ruin is enveloping them all.

Vittoria herself is partly defined by the above and similar answers to Brachiano—confident, condescending, even impertinent ; at the same time well-judged and effective : more clearly by her share in a concerted piece which is the central, as it is the most remarkable, passage in this scene. I call it concerted because, like the dialogues considered hitherto, all its parts are of equal importance and must be considered at once ; but also, by a device of eavesdropping and asides, they are made so to speak to sound at once. The writing almost ceases to be writing and to be dramatic ; it becomes operatic and almost a score.

Vittoria and Flamineo are in the centre of the stage, conversing both openly, and in undertones. The open conversation is intended for Camillo, Vittoria's husband, who is listening off. He has been promised that, if he would retire, Flamineo would woo Vittoria for him, to receive him back into her graces. Every public compliment to Camillo however is cancelled by a whispered slight :

Shall a gentleman so well descended as *Camillo*—a lousy slave that within these twenty yeares rode . . . mongst spits and dripping panes . . .

Thus two parts are already sounding at once, affecting and enriching each other. For it is as impossible for the audience to take the whisperings as it to take the shoutings at the value they would have in isolation. Camillo has already been exhibited—not an impressive person, but one who has shown signs of good feeling and good sense (he has, for example, refused to believe either that Brachiano's designs are a figment of his imagination, or that Vittoria is licentious because she is denied liberty); further he has confided his interests to Flameneo, who is therefore not only abusing him, but abusing him grossly; finally Camillo's very weakness and insignificance render the whispered detraction as unnecessary, as the public encomia are absurd. All this is, I think, kept before the hearer's mind by the contrast between the two; who is in consequence moved not so much to laughter by Flameneo's buffoonery, as to distaste. Flameneo is playing the fool not primarily for the audience, but for himself. The task he has undertaken degrades himself as well as Brachiano; as it deprives him of self-respect he can continue with it only by procuring continual diversion—as in this uproarious way.

At the same time a third part is sounding—Vittoria's. It consists chiefly of rests. To Flameneo's first representation that her husband is discontented she replies disingenuously that she has paid him marks of public respect: 'I did nothing to displease him; I carved to him at supper.' After that, though her desire to be rid of Camillo is as urgent as Flameneo's, she is silent; and that she gives no sign of approval to his buffoonery must, I think, be taken to mean that she disapproves. She has of course no need of it to continue in her task; which if evil, is not so evil as Flameneo's. She seeks, not to obtain a blackmailer's hold on Brachiano, but to reign publicly as his duchess; to commit adultery, to procure murder—but not to forfeit all claims to her own or her fellows' esteem. She seeks indeed the very opposite, though by mistaken means. And so her silence at this point performs, like almost everything else, at least a double function: it is a criticism of Flameneo, strengthening the criticism already formed by the audience; at the same time it is a criticism on herself, for what she does not approve of she must nevertheless endure. Though she despises Flameneo, he is a valuable ally whom as yet she dare not offend; it is some time before, though sick at the baiting

of Camillo, she ventures to suggest that it be cut short: 'How shals rid him hence?'

The passage is complicated to a yet further degree. For not only Camillo, but Brachiano, is listening;<sup>1</sup> is listening too for a purpose very similar to Camillo's. To him, as to Camillo, Flamineo has promised that he will woo Vittoria. So that everything Flamineo says openly has not only a double sense, in so far as it is or is not understood to be qualified by what at the same time he is whispering; it has also a third and a fourth sense, in so far as it is understood to apply to Camillo or to Brachiano. Each of course applies it to himself, but Vittoria and the audience apply it to both. And for the audience there results a final sense, compounded of all the rest; if indeed it can be called a single sense, when it is rich and complicated. It is rather a harmony or a *fugato*, to return to the metaphor of a concert which I have already used; which can be heard only by reading the play, which cannot be reproduced in a single train of words, but glossed only, now from one aspect, now from another.

In dealing with simpler dialogues, I have suggested that both parts to them should be considered together; and that neither can be taken as, in isolation, summing up the dialogue and therefore capable of standing alone. This is much more obviously true of passages from a piece of writing like the above. Abstracted from their context they can give rise only to obviously unsatisfactory and therefore widely divergent opinions. The following adjuration of Flamineo's has for example been accepted, according to the predilections of the critic, now as a 'flash' of genuine poetry, now as a piece of fustian:

Thou shalt lye in a bed stuf with turtles feathers, swoone in perfumed lynnens like the fellow was smothered in roses—so perfect shall be thy happinesse, that as men at Sea thinke land and trees and shippes go that way they go, so both heaven and earth shall seeme to go your voyage. Shalt meete him, tis fixt with nayles of dyamonds to inevitable necessitie.

But the passage is neither the one nor the other; rather it has

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<sup>1</sup>No editor gives this in a stage-direction; but it seems to me obvious that it is happening.

aspects of both, being a fragment of close and careful dramatic writing. Now it directs the reader's attention to Brachiano, now to Camillo, of both of whom it is spoken ; now to Flamineo, who speaks it. This diversity of aspect and function would, it might be thought, be apparent from the fragment itself ; from the otherwise inexplicable transition from the loose 'swoon in perfumed linen . . . ' to the restrained 'So perfect shall be thy voyage . . . ' ; and again from the latter to the extravagant ' 'tis fixed with nails and diamonds . . . ' But still more is it apparent from the fragment in its context ; where it is followed immediately by Vittoria's impatient and business-like 'How shals rid him hence?' This should discredit at least any attempt to deal with it as a flash of poetry.

I am sorry I have had to descend into such detail. Perhaps however it has served to make clear to some extent how I think the play should be read. All the play, I believe, should be read in a like manner. For the remaining part of Act I, for example, the concerted piece is carried on with Brachiano and Vittoria in the centre of the stage, Flamineo and Zanche on one side as a satyric chorus, and Cornelia behind. For the first time in the play she is a representative of virtue. Her presence is, to the audience, a running comment on the speeches of all the other characters ; especially upon Brachiano's to Vittoria :

You are lodged within his arms who shall protect you,  
From all the feavers of a jealous husband,  
From the poore envy of our flegmaticke Dutchesse—

In appearance it is an offer of chivalrous protection ; when in reality—as Vittoria knows, as Flamineo knows, as Brachiano would know if he would think—it is an undertaking to commit a double murder. Cornelia by her interruption tries to make him think ; but it is too late. And so Act II is not a succession of scenes between Isabella and the Grand Duke, the Grand Duke and Brachiano, Brachiano and Isabella, then between all three ; rather the scenes interpenetrate one another, are to be thought of, so to speak, as existing side by side. Isabella asks her brother the Grand Duke to intercede with her husband, Brachiano ; he promises to do so but does not, preferring to talk politics ; the dukes quarrel

is then sacrificed to Brachiano—or rather would be, if she did not seize the occasion for sacrificing herself. In Act III the Cardinal's denunciation of Vittoria should not be thought of as singularly weak, as it is general in its terms ; but weighed along with his confession to the Grand Duke that, against Vittoria, they have no case. If this is done, it will not appear necessary to exalt Vittoria at the expense of her opponents ; though shameless, she can show to advantage against those who apparently believe they ' have their salvation by patent.' Or in the last Act, Flamineo's final attempt to despoil Vittoria is but one with the attempts he has been making on Brachiano, and would have continued to make had he not been forestalled by death. Taking advantage of widowhood she is seeking to be rid of the past, to set herself up at last as a great lady, even as a *dévoté* ; by that past Flamineo compels her, giving her the opportunity, to seek his murder. He is about to take revenge for this and for consistent betrayal when Ludovico appears prepared to be rid of him ; then the young Duke appears determined to be rid of them all.

This sort of connection I am suggesting exists between sentences within certain speeches ; between the speeches in certain scenes, and between the majority of scenes themselves, exists, I believe, between all the acts. They are to be thought of not so much as following one another, but as existing side by side. They come of course in chronological succession, but Webster's interest is so little in this that either he does not suggest it (thereby laying himself open to the charge of not knowing how to construct) : or he does so by undistinguished means—such as dumb-shows, or soliloquies like Francisco's. This is not a soliloquy in the accepted meaning of the term, but the speech of a prolocutor. The acts as a whole do not show the development of different stages of the same story, perhaps their main purpose is not even to show the different stages. Rather I think they show different aspects of the same theme—the workings of evil which, though among the same people, must vary indefinitely. For it cannot rest until it is extinguished.

To read a play in this way is of course more difficult than to read it in the normal way. But perhaps we are becoming accustomed to the difficulty. With the disappearance of the Victorian notion of character, and in particular of developing character, as the

most important element in drama, the latter's complexity as a pattern of elements all of which must be envisaged at once is becoming apparent to us. We no longer look at the play of *Hamlet* as or through the character of Hamlet; somewhat similarly, I am suggesting there is no character in the *White Devil*—neither Vittoria nor Flamineo nor Cornelia—through which the play can be looked at.

This is however a simplification. To some extent we can look at the play through *Hamlet* because to some extent it is possible and we are indeed invited to sympathize with him. There would not seem to be any character in the *White Devil* with whom we are invited to sympathize to any extent that matters—not even Cornelia, the representative of virtue. She is rather a point of reference than a character—a point from which we can take our moral bearings when, amid the amount and variety of vice, they are in danger of being obscured.

Two questions immediately suggest themselves: whether it is possible to write a play totally deprived of a sympathetic character, and whether if possible it is worth doing? The first question is academic, since obviously the play has been written; so is the second at least for me who hold the play to be successful. Both are however worth raising, since they make clear the cost at which any success of this kind must be purchased. There can be no character on the stage who can dominate the whole action; or—to make a possibly more modest demand—whose summing up and account of the action the spectator—even temporarily—can trust. A powerful influence for unity is thus absent.

I have already said how I think this disadvantage is overcome in *The White Devil*. I have repeated that no single party to a dialogue, that no single sentence in a speech can be taken as completely representative; both parties, all sentences must be considered, and as far as possible impartially. And I have suggested that if they are so considered it will be seen how one serves to define the other, how a reference to a common standard in both of them becomes clear, how in consequence—though it may have no character as agent—an important moral unity is imposed.

Let me then proceed to the second question—is this worth doing? And the answer must depend on the purpose for which it is done. It will be in the affirmative if there is a purpose which is of

value, and which can be achieved in no other way.

There is, I think, one such, and I have already hinted what it is. It is the portrayal of a world of evil—not wholly evil of course, for such a world could not be conceived ; but one in which evil preponderates, and which therefore is working out its own destruction. This could not be presented as comprehended wholly or even largely by a single character ; for of its essence it is incomprehensible. Yet its existence at various times in history is undoubted.

Here I return to the large theme suggested in my title ; but only to touch upon it. The Tragedy of Blood seems to me to be the attempt of a succession of dramatists to deal with a world of evil, the existence of which was borne in upon them in late Elizabethan, early Jacobean times. Most of them attempted to do so by showing it, so to speak, from outside—by its effects on a comparatively virtuous person, not a member of itself. Such a person goes mad or is destroyed : the first example I suppose is Hieronymo, the most celebrated Lear. And the world of evil survives them—from outside it seems perfectly comprehensible, there is no reason why it should not go on. In Webster, however, or at least in *The White Devil*, the evil world is presented from within : it seems confusion, pointless activity, in the mind of the spectator alone there is awakened the notion of order ; he desires vehemently to see it transferred to the stage and so his attention is held until the close of the fifth act. With the arrival of a new ruler, a new generation, the whole evil world is destroyed.

JAMES SMITH.



# LITERARY CRITICISM IN FRANCE (II)

## IV. BAUDELAIRE.

THE more we study the criticism of the past, the more obvious it becomes that critics can be divided broadly into two main groups—those whose interest is purely ‘historical,’ and those whose work remains ‘actual’ and can still help to form taste. Many of the critics in the first group have been men of outstanding ability; their work is still good reading; it provides us with useful information about the development of critical theory and the condition of taste at a particular period; but there its utility ends. The first group includes Dryden and Johnson in England, Boileau and Voltaire in France, and it is coming more and more to include Sainte-Beuve and Taine. The second group includes Coleridge and Arnold as well as Baudelaire and Gourmont.

What is not perhaps so obvious is that, though the life of a critic is necessarily shorter than that of an imaginative writer, the time factor is not decisive. Boileau’s interest is purely historical, but parts of Sainte-Évremond’s work can still be read with profit; and though they were contemporaries, Baudelaire’s criticism is more actual than Taine’s. Nor is it simply a matter of being ‘right’ about an author. Dryden was right in his placing of Shakespeare and Boileau in his placing of Villon; but though this was of great importance at the time, it has not prolonged the life of their criticism. A critic’s value depends in the last resort on the quality of his sensibility and on his ability to stand aloof from the more ephemeral theories of his time.

These are some of the reasons why Baudelaire’s importance as a critic remains great while that of his contemporaries diminishes. He was potentially the greatest French critic of the century and he possessed in a high degree all the essential attributes of criticism. There is no doubt that his output would have been still more impressive had he been able to work in more congenial circumstances. We know from his *Letters*, however, that many of his critical studies were written because he needed the money to pay his

debts. He could not always choose his own subjects and he was not always free to express his true opinions. The result was that he expended his great gifts on minor writers and minor painters whose names only survive in his criticism. We may wonder, too, whether the long and flattering tributes to Hugo and Gautier would have been written if Baudelaire had felt able to dispense with their patronage.

It needs a real effort to read through *L'Art romantique* and the *Curiosités esthétiques*, but Baudelaire's criticism is so fragmentary and scattered that the effort is a necessary one. There is a good deal that is not of great value ; the excursions into æsthetic theory are not particularly helpful ; and some of the theories like the theory of *correspondances* have not worn well. But the effort is well repaid. Baudelaire's best criticism is a valuable guide to his own practice, and his comments on contemporary schools and writers illuminate the intricacies of the French literary scene as no other criticism of the time does. Finally, it is possible to extract a small body of criticism which is of permanent value and a model of how good criticism should be written.

' Criticism,' said Baudelaire, ' should be partial, passionate and political, that is to say, written from an exclusive point of view, but from the point of view which opens up the widest horizons.' His great merit as a critic lies, I think, in the fact that he possessed a genuinely philosophic mind and an extremely acute sensibility—two gifts which instead of destroying completed one another. He had an extraordinary faculty of going straight to the heart of a matter, in perceiving the importance of an artist or a movement in relation to ' the present time.' It is interesting to compare an extract from Sainte-Beuve's address on ' Tradition in Literature,' which was delivered in 1858, with some passages on the same subject from Baudelaire's ' Des Ecoles et Des Ouvriers ' in the 1846 Salon. This is Sainte-Beuve :

' Mais l'atticisme, mais l'urbanité, mais le principe de sens et de raison qui s'y mêle à la grâce, ne nous en séparons pas. Le sentiment d'un certain beau conforme à notre race, à notre éducation, à notre civilisation, voilà ce dont il ne faut jamais se départir . . .

Pour maintenir la tradition, il ne suffit point toutefois de

la bien rattacher à ses monuments les plus élevés et les plus augustes ; il convient de la vérifier, de la contrôler sans cesse sur les points les plus rapprochés, de la rajeunir même, et de la tenir dans un rapport perpétuel avec ce qui est vivant. Ici nous touchons à une question assez délicate ; car il ne s'agit pas de venir introduire dans l'enseignement des noms trop nouveaux, de juger hors de propos des ouvrages du jour, de confondre les fonctions et les rôles.'

Comparing the order of the great tradition with the chaos and confusion of his own times, Baudelaire writes :

' Dans l'un, turbulence, tohu-bohu de styles et de couleurs, cacophonie de tons, trivialités énormes, prosaïsme de gestes et d'attitudes, noblesse de convention, *poncifs* de toutes sortes, et tout cela visible et clair, non-seulement dans les tableaux juxtaposés, mais encore dans le même tableau, bref,—absence complète d'unité, dont le résultat est une fatigue effroyable pour l'esprit et pour les yeux.

Dans l'autre, ce respect qui fait ôter leurs chapeaux aux enfants, et vous saisit l'âme, comme la poussière des tombes et des caveaux saisit la gorge, est l'effet, non point du vernis jaune et de la crasse du temps, mais de l'unité, de l'unité profonde . . .

Là des écoles, et ici des ouvriers émancipés.

Il y avait encore des écoles sous Louis XV, il y en avait une sous l'Empire,—une école, c'est-à-dire une foi, c'est-à-dire l'impossibilité du doute. Il y avait des élèves unis par des principes communs, obéissant à la règle d'un chef puissant, et l'aidant dans tous ses travaux.'<sup>1</sup>

It is impossible not to be struck by the contrast between Sainte-Beuve's highflown rhetoric, which gets no nearer the concrete than '*un certain beau conforme à notre race,*' and the intense feeling behind '*ce respect qui . . . vous saisit l'âme, comme la poussière . . . saisit la gorge*' or, in another place, the ironic reference to '*quelques excentriques, sublimes et souffrants.*' Tradition in literature, whatever else it means, must mean continuity of feeling. Now it is clear that Sainte-Beuve's address is lip-service to an abstraction. He was like most Frenchmen aware of tradition in a general way, but his attitude is historical and has nothing of the

extraordinary actuality of Baudelaire's criticism. It was a closed circle and the only modern master who was not a Frenchman for whom he found a place was Shakespeare. He saw that modern writers must be incorporated in the ancient framework, but the process was to be a purely mechanical one. He did not *feel* the relation between the modern writer and the masters of the past ; his attitude, as expressed in the last three lines, was simply that of the selection committee of some public gallery. Baudelaire's criticism, on the other hand, is a perfect example of his combination of sensibility and wide powers of generalization. He feels the unity of the old order and the chaos of the new ; his '*vaste population de médiocrités . . . qui cherchent à se faire un caractère par un système d'emprunts contradictoires*' is an admirably concrete statement of dilemma which is complacently ignored by Sainte-Beuve ; and when he finds the source of the trouble in an absence of 'faith' we can have no doubt about the correctness of his diagnosis.

Baudelaire was less of a technical philosopher than Taine or Gourmont and his mind was more flexible than theirs. Indeed, it is evident from his insistence on Original Sin both in his criticism and in the letters and diaries that his point of view was primarily theological. In the essay on 'Le Peintre de la Vie Moderne' he wrote :

'La plupart des erreurs relatives au beau naissent de la fausse conception du xviii<sup>e</sup> siècle relative à la morale. La nature fut prise dans ce temps-là comme base, source et type de tout bien et de tout beau possibles. La négation du péché originel ne fut pas pour peu de chose dans l'aveuglement général de cette époque. Si toutefois nous consentons à en référer simplement au fait, visible à l'expérience de tous les âges et à la *Gazette des Tribunaux*, nous verrons que la nature n'enseigne rien, ou presque rien, c'est-à-dire qu'elle *contraint* l'homme à dormir, à boire, à manger, et à se garantir, tant bien que mal, contre les hostilités de l'atmosphère. C'est elle aussi qui pousse l'homme à tuer son semblable, à le manger, à le séquestrer, à le torturer ; car, sitôt que nous sortons de l'ordre des nécessités et des besoins pour entrer dans celui du luxe et des plaisirs, nous voyons que la nature ne peut conseiller que le crime.'<sup>2</sup>

Although this is a dogmatic statement, it does not inhibit the critic as Taine's dogmatism does. It does provide a basis for constructive criticism ; it does, when elaborated, help us to understand the causes and the weaknesses of the naturalist movement in French literature.

Baudelaire shows the same sureness of touch, the same faculty for going straight to the root of the matter, when he passes judgment—an admirably generous and impartial judgment—on the Romantic Movement :

‘ Certainement il y aurait injustice à nier les services qu’a rendus l’école dite romantique. Elle nous rappela à la vérité de l’image, elle détruisit les poncifs académiques, et même, au point de vue supérieur de la linguistique, elle ne mérite pas les dédains dont l’ont iniquement couverte certains pédants impuissants. Mais par son principe même, l’insurrection romantique était condamnée à une vue courte. La puérile utopie de l’école de *l’art pour l’art*, en excluant la morale, et souvent même la passion, était nécessairement stérile. Elle se mettait en flagrante contravention avec le génie de l’humanité. Au nom des principes supérieurs qui constituent la vie universelle, nous avons le droit de la déclarer coupable d’hétérodoxie . . . ’<sup>3</sup>

These passages are both interesting because they show that in making a critical judgment Baudelaire uses a definite body of principles as a point of reference. It is by this standard that he condemns the excesses of Romanticism and the statement that it excludes morality, is a philosophical way of pointing out its fundamental immaturity.

His extraordinary critical sensibility is still more evident in particular judgments. What could be fairer or more discriminating than his opinion of Hugo—Hugo who at that time was universally regarded as ‘ the great poet ? ’

‘ M. Victor Hugo, dont je ne veux certainement pas diminuer la noblesse et la majesté, est un ouvrier beaucoup plus adroit qu’inventif, un travailleur bien plus correct que créateur. Delacroix est quelquefois maladroit, mais essentiellement créateur. M. Victor Hugo laisse voir dans tous ses tableaux, lyriques et dramatiques, un système d’alignement et de contrastes uniformes.

L'excentricité elle-même prend chez lui des formes symétriques. Il possède à fond et emploie froidement tous les tons de la rime, toutes les ressources de l'antithèse, toutes les tricheries de l'apposition. C'est un compositeur de décadence ou de transition, qui se sert de ses outils avec une dextérité véritablement admirable et curieuse. M. Hugo était naturellement académicien avant que de naître, et si nous étions encore au temps des merveilles fabuleuses, je croirais volontiers que les lions verts de l'Institut, quand il passait devant le sanctuaire courroucé, lui ont souvent murmuré d'une voix prophétique: "Tu seras de l'Académie!"<sup>4</sup>

In another place:

' M. Victor Hugo est un grand poète sculptural qui a l'oeil fermé à la spiritualité.'<sup>5</sup>

He says brilliantly of Ingres:

' Le grand défaut de M. Ingres, en particulier, est de vouloir imposer à chaque type qui pose sous son oeil un perfectionnement plus ou moins despotique, emprunté au répertoire des idées classiques.'<sup>6</sup>

Criticism is not so rich in colour that we can afford to overlook the following passage from the fine essay on Constantin Guys:

' La Turquie a fourni aussi à notre cher G d'admirables motifs de compositions: les fêtes du Baïram, splendeurs profondes et ruisseantes, au fond desquelles apparaît, comme un soleil pâle, l'ennui permanent du sultan défunt.'<sup>7</sup>

No one excels Baudelaire in 'placing' a bad writer or a bad painter. He writes of Hégésippe Moreau, for example:

' Quelque sujet et quelque genre qu'il traite, il est élève de quelqu'un. A une forme empruntée il n'ajoute d'original que le mauvais ton, si toutefois une chose aussi universelle que le mauvais ton peut être dite originale . . . Ce n'est pas la volupté de l'épicurien, c'est plutôt la sensualité claustrale, échauffée, du cuistre, sensualité de prison et de dortoir.'<sup>8</sup>

He observes of a bad painter:

' Je hais cet homme parce que ses tableaux ne sont point de

la peinture, mais une masturbation agile et fréquente, une irritation de l'épiderme français.'

Finally, one should look at the criticism of Balzac which is buried like hidden treasure in the dreary wastes of the essay on Gautier:

'Balzac, grand, terrible, complexe aussi, figure le monstre d'une civilisation, et toutes ses luttes, ses ambitions et ses fureurs . . . J'ai mainte fois été étonné que la grande gloire de Balzac fût de passer pour un observateur ; il m'avait toujours semblé que son principal mérite était d'être visionnaire, et visionnaire passionné. Tous ses personnages sont doués de l'ardeur vitale dont il était animé lui-même. Toutes ses fictions sont aussi profondément colorées que les rêves. Depuis le sommet de l'aristocratie jusqu'aux bas-fonds de la plèbe, tous les acteurs de sa *Comédie* sont plus âpres à la vie, plus actifs et rusés dans la lutte, plus patients dans le malheur, plus goulus dans la jouissance, plus angéliques dans le dévouement, que la comédie du vrai monde ne nous les montre. Bref, chacun, chez Balzac, même les portières, a du génie. Toutes les âmes sont des armes chargées de volonté jusqu'à la gueule. C'est bien Balzac lui-même. Et comme tous les êtres du monde extérieur s'offraient à l'oeil de son esprit avec un relief puissant et une grimace saisissante, il a fait se convulser ses figures ; il a noirci leurs ombres et illuminé leurs lumières. Son goût prodigieux du détail, qui tient à une ambition immodérée de tout voir, de tout faire voir, de tout deviner, de tout faire deviner, l'obligeait d'ailleurs à marquer avec plus de force les lignes principales, pour sauver la perspective de l'ensemble.'

There is, perhaps, more genuine criticism in this passage of Baudelaire's than in the ninety pages of Taine's essay.

#### V. REMY DE GOURMONT.

'As I have already explained on several occasions,' wrote Remy de Gourmont, 'contrary to the opinion generally held, criticism is perhaps the most subjective of all literary forms. It is a perpetual confession on the part of the critic. He may think that he is analysing the works of other people, but it is himself

that he is revealing and exposing to the public. This necessity explains very well why criticism is as a rule so mediocre and why the critic seldom manages to hold our attention even when he is dealing with questions in which we are most keenly interested. In order to be a good critic, indeed, one must possess a strong personality. The critic must impose himself on the reader and to this end he must rely not on the choice of subject, but on the quality of his own mind. The subject is of small importance in art, or at any rate it is only one part of art ; it is of no more importance in criticism where it is never more than a pretext.<sup>10</sup>

This is not a complete definition of the function of criticism, nor, as we shall see from Gourmont's own work, is it wholly sound ; but it draws attention to three points which are seen to be of particular importance when we remember the weaknesses of Sainte-Beuve and Taine. In the first place, it insists on the personal factor in criticism and is therefore a corrective to the attempts of nineteenth-century critics to reduce criticism to an exact science. In the second place, although there can be no substitute for personal sensibility, this alone is not enough. Criticism must have behind it the whole force of the critic's personality, the whole force powerful, independent mind. In the third place, and perhaps the most important of all, we find a distinguished critic asserting for the first time that criticism is valuable for its own sake and is not (as Taine tried to make it) a branch of some other science.<sup>11</sup>

It was the clarity with which Gourmont grasped this third point that helped to make him one of the most distinguished critics of his time. The *Problème du style* has had, directly and indirectly, a considerable influence on contemporary English criticism. It is one of the finest works of general criticism that has appeared during the past fifty years and though it deals almost exclusively with French writers, it is essentially a European work and should be almost as valuable to the English as to the French specialist. The papers collected in the seven volumes of the *Promenades littéraires* have lost none of their freshness with the passing of time. When they first appeared these brief and eminently readable *chroniques* were something new in literary journalism. They took the place of Sainte-Beuve's elaborate *causeries* with their vast parade of erudition. Gourmont was not only more stimulating, more of a critic than Sainte-Beuve, but in



the best of the *Promenades littéraires*—notably in the studies of Renan, Brunetière and Lemaître—he contrived in the space of nine or ten pages to say the essential about his authors. No one who works on the same authors can afford to overlook what Gourmont has said about them ; and it is difficult to think of any collection of literary essays to which one returns more often or more profitably.

In spite of his great merits, however, Gourmont's criticism leaves the reader with an ill-defined sense of dissatisfaction. I have sometimes thought that this impression may be due to the economy imposed by the *chronique*, to the fact that it may appear thin when compared with the weighty studies of Gourmont's immediate predecessors ; but constant re-reading suggests that Gourmont's particular faults are inseparably connected with his particular virtues and the two can only be discussed together.

' *La seule recherche féconde,*' he wrote in the Preface to the *Problème du style*, '*est la recherche du non-vrai.*' It is a concise statement not only of his own method, but also of the temper which informed the whole of his writings. He was a sceptic and an amateur of physiology, possibly because physiology seemed to provide the only certain foothold in an age of crumbling systems. His scepticism was complete, but it was a genial scepticism. His criticism is singularly free from the faults which make critics of the same period who wrote in English seem crude and provincial. The fact that he was a Frenchman and his background Catholic enabled him to appreciate the issues better than an Englishman and preserved him from the Nonconformist conscience which has always been one of the greatest enemies of clear thinking. Although he remarked bluntly in his paper on Renan '*Je n'aime guère le style des écrivains dont je déteste la pensée,*' his treatment of writers whose beliefs he did not share was often remarkable for its justice and impartiality. His description of Verlaine as 'one of France's greatest Catholic poets' errs, perhaps, on the side of generosity ; but in the *Problème du style* he said admirably of Bossuet (whose 'thought' can hardly have been sympathetic to him) :

' Bossuet écrit pour édifier ou pour convaincre, mais sa sensibilité générale est si riche, sa vitalité si profonde, son énergie si violente, qu'il peut se dédoubler, et rester un écrivain en ne voulant être qu'un apôtre ' (p. 49).

His criticism of the *Vie de Jésus*, which one might have expected him to find more sympathetic than Bossuet, is particularly interesting :

‘ Le plus contestable, pour le fond, des ouvrages de Renan, la *Vie de Jésus*, est précisément celui qui est le moins bien écrit. L’incertitude de l’idée a fait vaciller le style ; cela tremblote comme une lampe d’église, une nuit que le vent souffle par un vitrail brisé. Dans beaucoup d’autres écrits de Renan, la souplesse solide de son écriture s’enroule merveilleusement à la solidité flexible de sa pensée. M. Brunetière parle de la “ souveraine clarté ” de sa langue, mais comment peut-il admirer une transparence, alors fâcheuse, qui n’a d’autre résultat que de faire mieux voir le trouble ou le néant du fond ? Mais comment même peut-il se faire que l’eau soit pure et transparente quand le fond est bourbeux ? Les ondes ne sont claires que si elles s’appuient sur la fermeté d’un fond de roche.’<sup>12</sup>

This marks the end of the method, practised by Sainte-Beuve and Taine, of treating a writer’s ‘ style ’ and his ‘ thought ’ as though they were in some way separable. Gourmont was pre-eminently a literary critic and in this passage he uses the methods of literary criticism to expose the fundamental weaknesses of Renan’s work as a whole.

In spite of limitations of which I shall have something to say later, the sceptical approach is impressive in its astringency and up to a point it constitutes a genuine intellectual discipline. Gourmont was one of the first writers who systematically attacked vague romantic appreciation and tried to make criticism not a science, but scientific in a wide sense which was not Taine’s sense ; and his declaration that ‘ style is a specialisation of sensibility ’ is a landmark in the history of criticism. The most valuable parts of the *Problème du style* are, indeed, those in which Gourmont sets out to define sensibility. In the well-known passage on Flaubert he wrote :

‘ Flaubert incorporait toute sa sensibilité à ses œuvres ; et par sensibilité, j’entends, ici comme partout, le pouvoir général de sentir tel qu’il est inégalement développé en chaque être humain. La sensibilité comprend la raison elle même, qui n’est que de la sensibilité cristallisée. Hors de ses livres, où il se

transvasait goutte à goutte, jusqu'à la lie, Flaubert est fort peu intéressant ; il n'est plus que lie : son intelligence se trouble, s'exaspère en une fantaisie incohérente . . . Loin que son œuvre soit impersonnelle, les rôles sont ici renversés : c'est l'homme qui est vague et tissé d'incohérences ; c'est l'œuvre qui vit, respire, souffre et sourit noblement.' (p. 117).

For Gourmont the great writer is the writer whose work is his life, and the bad writer is the writer who is divided between writing and action. Thus he observes acutely of the solitaries of Port-Royal :

' Ils écrivaient d'un style tout extérieur, où ils n'incorporaient presque aucune parcelle de leur sensibilité, la gardant toute pour leur vie, pour leur activité religieuse.' (p. 48).

The definition of sensibility is undeniably impressive, but when we find Gourmont writing :

' Racine, dont le style est si rarement plastique, garde pour ses maîtresses d'abord, pour Dieu ensuite, presque toute sa sensibilité. Le sentiment profond de l'amour, qui était en lui, n'a pas passé dans les actes de ses personnages ; ils expriment des passions extrêmes en un style abstrait, glacé, et diplomatique' (pp. 50-1).

it is impossible not to feel disconcerted. There are, I think, two explanations. One is that the definition of sensibility is not as conclusive as it sounds. The other is that like most French critics, Gourmont was more impressive when making general statements of principle than when elucidating a text. They are both worth discussion.

Flaubert was a great novelist, but we may doubt whether he was the perfect writer for which Gourmont took him. Indeed, his admiration appears to be one of the symptoms of the peculiar limitations of his own critical sensibility. His emphasis on the physiological element in sensibility was timely and important, but when he observes

' Le style est un produit physiologique et l'un des plus constants, quoique dans la dépendance des diverses fonctions vitales ' (*ibid.*, p. 19).

we may suspect that in practice the definition was narrower than one would expect from the passage on Flaubert given above, that it was reduced to a physiological function in the interests of an inadequate metaphysic. It explains, for example, why Gourmont should admire Flaubert's style, which is rich in the expression of physical sensations, and find Racine's '*abstrait, glacé, et diplomatique*.' The criticism of the style of the 'Solitaires' is just, but when Gourmont goes on to assert

'L'art est incompatible avec une préoccupation morale ou religieuse ; le beau ne porte ni à la piété, ni à la contrition, et la gloire de Dieu éclate principalement en des ouvrages de la mentalité la plus humble et de la rhétorique a plus médiocre' (p. 48).

he imposes a drastic theoretical limitation which he would hardly tolerate in the concrete study of a poet.<sup>13</sup> This view is confirmed by his asides on the nature and value of artistic experience. When he tries to explain why it is valuable, he falls back on generalities:

'L'art est ce qui donne une sensation de beau et de nouveau à la fois, de beau inédit ; on ne peut bien comprendre et cependant être ému.'

Poetry is transformed into a mystery which appears to call not for comprehension, but for adoration. It is a mystery to which only an élite are admitted. '*Car je crois*,' writes Gourmont, '*que l'art est, par essence, absolument inintelligible au peuple*.'

The language that he uses to describe his favourite writers is not less instructive. He speaks enthusiastically of Mallarmé's '*sonnets les plus délicieusement obscurs*' and of '*l'art délicat et ingénieux d'aujourd'hui*.' It is to his credit that he was the indefatigable champion of the 'advanced' writers of his own time, but Mr. Eliot's description of him as 'the critical consciousness of a generation' points to a serious limitation in his criticism. His intense preoccupation with the theories of the Symbolist Movement—a preoccupation that is apparent in his novels and his poetry as well as in his criticism—seems to have turned him into a dilettante who gloried in anything that was recondite and in 'novel' and 'deliciously obscure' sensations partly because they were inaccessible to other people. The terms that he used to describe

poetic experience suggest that his sensibility was distinctly limited. His admiration for *le beau inédit* impaired his appreciation of Racine and his emphasis on 'the delicate and ingenious art of to-day' accounts, perhaps, for his failure with Rimbaud whom he significantly called '*un crapaud congrument pustuleux*.' For an adequate reading of that poet would have needed a range of feeling of which Gourmont was incapable.

It is one of the disadvantages of Gourmont's sceptical approach that he was more effective as a destructive critic and one of the finest papers in the whole of the *Promenades littéraires* is the brilliant attack on Brunetière. But it is symptomatic that his destructive work was limited to academic writers like Brunetière and the unhappy M. Abalat. His attempt to make poetry something for an élite is a sign of the negative attitude he adopted to one of the most pressing problems of his generation, as it is one of the most pressing problems of our own. He does not escape the charge of being the critic of the Ivory Tower whose aim is to take refuge from the barbarism of the outside world.

I have said that Gourmont was more impressive when making general statements of principle than when elucidating a text. It is not without significance that he wrote better about the work of other critics than about poetry. Although he was the official critic of the Symbolist Movement, he never wrote a searching or substantial book about the *poetry* of the Movement; and compared with his able account of the philosophy of Symbolism in the paper on *Idealism*, his studies of individual writers like Corbière and Laforgue, Verlaine and Mallarmé, are fragmentary and disappointing. For in the last resort he was true to the French approach; he was more interested in the movement of ideas behind the poetry than in the poetry itself. His limitations as a critic sometimes made his discussion of ideas less impressive than it should have been. In his paper on Brunetière he quotes a passage from that critic's book on Balzac:

'It is not only not true that everything appears differently to different people according to personal idiosyncracies . . . but reality is the same for all intelligences. There is only one point of view from which it is true and "in conformity with its object," just as in science there is only one formula that is truly scientific.'

‘ With this principle,’ retorts Gourmont, ‘ one ends by denying the legitimacy of all individual activity. Art disappears altogether . . . Every object, every fact, only permits of one valid representation, which is true ; and ideas are necessarily divided into two classes—the true and the false . . .

‘ Let us remain true to the principles of subjective idealism which are impregnable. The world is my representation of it. It is the only creative principle, the only one which allows the full development and ordering of intelligence and sensibility.’<sup>14</sup>

As a criticism of Brunetière this is final ; as a statement of the philosophy inherent in the poetry of the period, it is undoubtedly true. But Gourmont was so impressed by idealism as a philosophy, so in love with freedom and individualism, that it did not occur to him to ask whether the influence of this philosophy on poetry was as advantageous as he chose to think. It did not strike him that an extreme individualism was actually having an unfortunate influence on language which was losing its ancient power of translating sensations into words and was already showing signs of developing into the *jeu de mots* which we now know as Surrealism ; and the sort of criticism which Rivière made in his fine essay, ‘ Reconnaissance à Dada,’ was beyond the scope of his method.

‘ In order to be a good critic . . . ’ wrote Gourmont in a passage already quoted, ‘ one must possess a strong personality.’ It is, I think, the lack of a strong personality, a fundamental weakness of character, which accounts for the ‘ ill-defined sense of dissatisfaction ’ we get from his criticism. This is emphasized by a glance at his ‘ creative ’ work. Although *Le songe d’une femme* is still kept in the Librarian’s Room at the London Library, this curious nineteenth-century novelette no longer strikes us as a particularly sensational performance ; but it is an extremely instructive one. The book is, significantly, cast in the form of letters in which the characters recount their *amours* at considerable length. These refined young men with their half-hearted copulation and their passionate interest in underclothing—even the waves on the shore carry us irresistibly back to *dentelles*—represent, I suppose, a perfect example of the attitude to physical love which Lawrence attacked ; and it must be a cause for lasting regret that the book never fell under his pen. Behind the remote, rather bookish figure

in its monkish habit which gives the *Promenades littéraires*, for all their charm, a certain unreality, rises the spectre of a libidinous old man—a passive and almost contemplative spectre which likes to peer and pry into the love affairs of others. ‘What,’ you ask, ‘is the point of this mechanical copulation and these lubricious imaginings?’ ‘Oh,’ it might be replied, ‘this is a specialization of sensibility which is unequally developed in every human being and which in my case takes the form of an orgy of amorous fingering.’ In fact, the *Songe d’une femme* is a practical illustration of a curious passage in the *Problème du style*, comparing the influence of love and literature. ‘It is,’ writes Gourmont, ‘exactly like the influence of one literature on another. In the same way women (for that matter men too) are rejuvenated by a new love affair and find in a series of almost uninterrupted “passions” the very principle of their vital activity’ (p. 22). The whole of Gourmont is in this passage. He was at some pains to explain in the *Promenades philosophiques* that philosophical idealism and materialism are perfectly compatible, and his work is an ample demonstration of the point. Life and literature were simply a succession of novel sensations which provided the necessary stimulus to enable the human organism to renew its vitality and carry on. There could be no meaning, no coherence in a hedonistic system whose only values were novelty and intensity—values which themselves depended on the assumption that the real is unknowable. Idealism was, at any rate in Gourmont’s case, a reaction against an extreme philosophical realism and was certainly born of the fear that once the possibility of a final reality was admitted, life would lose its charm and excitement and become dull. A philosophy which turns life into a despairing game of make-believe seems to me to be a poor thing and it is extraordinary that Gourmont should have countenanced it.

Gourmont was a very stimulating and, up to a point, a very able critic ; but he seems to me to fall short of greatness. He was endowed in a high degree with the Frenchman’s mental alertness and his curiosity about life ; but it was precisely an undisciplined curiosity coupled with a fundamental dilettantism which led him into unprofitable ways and detracted from the critical intensity of his work. His scepticism, which was valuable as a critical approach in his time, had in the long run a disabling effect on his writing

and it is impossible not to be struck over and over again with the fundamental poverty of his outlook.

## VI. CONCLUSION.

It is time to draw some tentative conclusions of a more general nature, to decide how far the French critics of the last century fulfilled the function of criticism. 'The aim of criticism,' said Eliot, 'is the elucidation of works of art and the correction of taste.' The words must be understood in their widest sense. It is not enough for criticism to sharpen our appreciation of a writer's 'style' or to interpret the 'meaning' of his work; good criticism must provide the reader with an education, must establish a relation between literature and our ordinary everyday life. It is clear that these aims can only be accomplished if the critic possesses great sensibility and a philosophical outlook or, as Mrs. Leavis once called it, a certain 'wisdom.' The main criticism which has to be made of French writers is that they try to make philosophy do the work of analysis and that they also use it as a substitute for that more general wisdom which we expect of a good critic.

The philosophical training which forms part of French education accounts for the apparent balance and maturity of French critics and the ease with which they handle a technical vocabulary. It stimulates the Frenchman's intellectual alterness and his curiosity about life which are the two greatest virtues of French criticism, and it certainly helps to give it an air of slick professionalism which sometimes makes English criticism look amateurish by comparison. The French mind is better endowed for speculative thought than the English, but it is on the whole less sensitive and less concrete. It is one of the consequences of a training in philosophy that it encourages the Frenchman's natural tendency to abstraction, to manipulate counters like *pensée* and *être moral* which instead of illuminating the work under discussion have precisely the opposite effect; they take the critic's mind off his text and carry him into a realm of abstract theorising for which the work of art is merely a pretext. The result is that the French critic is more concerned with his own system than with the intrinsic merits of his author, more interested in determining the 'group' or 'school' to which he belongs than in the excellence of his poetry.



A work of art may have important implications in the sphere of morality, but the discovery of these implications pre-supposes the full and unfettered response of the critic to the work before him for which no system of philosophy, whatever its intrinsic excellence, can ever be a substitute. It is tempting to make a theoretic distinction between the two 'moments' of the critical act—the critic's response to his text and the philosophical analysis of that response, though we may doubt whether in practice there can be complete separation between the two. It remains true, however, that some critics are capable of excellent detailed analysis but are unable to perceive the general implications of the work that they criticize, while others are prevented by the excellence of their philosophical equipment from making that full and unfettered response to the work of art which is the basis of all criticism. This is undoubtedly true of many of the most eminent French critics. It thus happens that though French criticism in the nineteenth century was full of stimulating theories and curious speculations, it suffered from a pronounced defect of sensibility,

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<sup>1</sup>*Curiosités esthétiques* (Ed. Crépet) pp. 192-3.

<sup>2</sup>*L'art romantique* (Ed. Crépet) pp. 95-6.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 177.

<sup>4</sup>*Curiosités esthétiques*, p. 104.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 247.

<sup>6</sup>*L'art romantique*, p. 68.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 80.

<sup>8</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 346.

<sup>9</sup>*L'art romantique*, p. 168.

<sup>10</sup>*Promenades littéraires*, I, p. 14.

<sup>11</sup>As far as I am aware it is not until 1921 that we find an English critic making a similar declaration. In that year, Mr. Middleton Murry wrote in an article called 'A Critical Credo' (reprinted in *Countries of the Mind*, I): 'The function of criticism is, therefore, primarily the function of literature itself, to provide a means of expression for the critic.'

<sup>12</sup>*Promenades littéraires*, I, pp. 17-8.

<sup>13</sup>He was, in fact, obliged to qualify it on the next page when he made his admirable comment on Bossuet quoted above.

<sup>14</sup>*Promenades littéraires*, III, pp. 32-3.

and the standard of 'practical criticism' was, with the exception of Baudelaire, Gourmont and Paul Bourget—a greatly underrated critic whom I have not been able to deal with—extremely low.

It has been suggested that French critics have substituted philosophy for the more general wisdom which is essential to good criticism. It is a notable fact that the French critic attaches more importance to the external order and coherence of his system than to its flexibility or its completeness. The result is that his work often turns out to be inferior to that of English writers whose philosophical equipment appears at first to be less impressive. For this reason it seems to me that men like Sainte-Beuve and Taine are in the last analysis inferior to the representatives of the great humanist tradition in England—to Coleridge and to Arnold.

MARTIN TURNELL.

## ESCAPISM IN LITERATURE

WE often hear it said disparagingly that some writer or other is a mere 'escapist,' or that a particular piece of writing is sheer 'escapism.' It is implied that the true function of literature is, not to offer escape from unpleasant facts, but to help the reader to face up to reality, and cope with it successfully. On the other hand we are told by many of those who are interested in the theory of art that the proper function of all art, and therefore of literature, is 'cathartic,' that it should purge the spirit of pent-up forces which cannot express themselves in actual life, that it should afford symbolical fulfilment to our starved needs. Through art these pent-up forces are said to obtain 'release.' Sometimes it is claimed that, by diverting attention from the sordid actuality, art constructs symbols of a deeper reality, more consonant with the spirit's real needs.

What degree of truth is there in these seemingly opposed views? It must, I think, be admitted that there is, indeed, a vice which may appropriately be called 'escapism.' Besides 'release,' literature has another function, which cannot be called release save in a very far-fetched manner. The charge of escapism, I

shall argue, is justified only when this other function, though ostensibly fulfilled, is as a matter of fact evaded.

In order to defend this opinion I must say briefly what in my view literature is, and what its relation is to the rest of human life. One who is not a literary critic ought perhaps to refrain from discussing this subject, particularly in a literary journal. The expert may be able to show either that my categories are false or that my whole view has been stated long ago, and much more aptly. However, when fools rush in, they may with their mangled remains pave the way for angels.

Literature is the expression of thoughts and feelings in words ; but obviously not all writing is literature in the strict sense. All writing takes effect by affording expression or fulfilment, direct or symbolical, to human needs. Every kind of need, simple or subtle, moral or immoral, may be grist to the mill of literature ; but there is one kind of need, and one kind of satisfaction, which literature must to some extent fulfil. In order to be literature, a piece of writing, I should say, must satisfy the impulse for the clarification and development, and also, of course, the expression, of experience itself. For example, it must afford fulfilment not only to romantic love or the love of nature but also to the need to be more precisely and vividly aware of these experiences. Even if many of the needs which gain expression in writing are unconscious needs, the writing is not literature unless it affords something more than unconscious symbolical fulfilment of those needs. It must also satisfy the need for precise and vivid consciousness of all that is available to conscious inspection. If it can actually extend the frontiers of consciousness into the territory of the unconscious, so much the better.

This need to clarify and develop experience, then, seems to me the essential motive and the essential import of all that is genuine literature. By 'clarification' I mean the detailed clarification of familiar modes of experience. By 'development' I mean the development of new and more subtle modes. This distinction though not absolute, is useful. Out of this need for clarification and development of experience springs the need for accuracy or efficiency of expression, and therefore for pregnancy and economy and coherence of expression. Efficiency of expression, though at first instrumental, comes to be valued intrinsically, and

is, indeed, one of the main sources of literary delight. But to regard literature as solely concerned with efficiency of expression, no matter what experiences are expressed, is surely mistaken. The question as to what *kind* of experience is expressed is not irrelevant. The efficient expression of trivial experiences cannot fully satisfy the essential motive of literature, which is not only the clarification but the development of consciousness. There are then two criteria by which literature is to be judged, but one is primary and entails the other. The primary criterion is the significance of the subject-matter in relation to the demand for the intensifying, clarifying, broadening, deepening, and unifying of experience, and the development of new modes of experience. The other criterion is the efficiency of expression by which this end is pursued. This distinction, however, is to some extent misleading, since the effort for efficiency of expression does not merely convey experience to the reader, but actually creates, in some degree, new capacities for experience in the writer's own mind.

I am assuming that there is a real difference between the relatively superficial and the relatively penetrating kinds of experience, and again between the relatively narrow or dissociated and the relatively comprehensive or integrated kinds. This distinction seems to be implied in nearly all serious literary criticism, and indeed in nearly all educational theory. Also we constantly employ it in our judgments of the calibre of our acquaintances. In my view, it lies at the foundation of a sound social philosophy.

Of course in practice we often violently disagree as to what constitutes the more clarified or the more developed experience or behaviour. But in the abstract, the development of experience seems to involve progress in respect of more penetrating and comprehensive awareness of the self and the world (including other selves), and more appropriate and creative feeling and striving in relation to the character of self and world. This formula, no doubt, is very controversial, particularly in respect of the meaning of 'appropriate.' But both in literature and in our daily practical lives it is assumed that feelings and actions can, in some important sense, be appropriate or inappropriate to objective situations. The essential function of literature, then, is to render experience cognitively more true and affectively and conatively more appropriate.

One of its subsidiary functions is to afford symbolical satisfaction to extant conscious or unconscious needs which do not obtain adequate satisfaction in actual life. These needs may be of any degree of development, from simple animal functions, such as rest, muscular activity and physical sex, to capacities which emerge only on the distinctively human level, or at the extreme upper reach of human nature. Somewhere in the human category we must include, for instance, capacities for self-conscious and other-conscious personal intercourse, for intellectual comprehension, for æsthetic appreciation, and for a religious 'coming to terms with the universe.' All these needs may demand 'release' in literature.

Since all literature, to be literature at all, must in some manner clarify experience, we may say that all literature must be to some significant extent 'creative.' I say 'significant' because obviously there is a trivial sense in which every fresh statement is 'creative.' It causes *something* to happen in the mind of the reader, and in the mind of the writer himself. In this sense even the extremely familiar proposition  $2 + 2 = 4$  is 'creative.' But when Keats said, 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty,' he produced something creative in a more significant sense. Even though, as I believe, this famous pronouncement is more false than true, it came, presumably, as something of a revelation to the poet and to his readers. It was a growing point for far-reaching new experiences in men's minds.

For our present purpose we may distinguish between four types of literature. Any particular work is likely to have aspects or passages characteristic of all four types, but it may also be predominantly of one type rather than another. Though all literature is to some extent creative, I shall call the first of these types distinctively 'creative literature.' The others are 'propaganda literature,' 'release literature' and 'escape literature.'

In 'creative literature' the dominant motive and the main import are creative. In the writer's own mind the producing of the work is a creative experience; and in the reader's mind, the reading. 'Release' and propaganda in creative literature may play subsidiary parts, but they are made to serve the essential literary function of clarifying and developing consciousness, of world or self. In so far as this process is cognitive, it will consist

in an apprehending of fresh aspects of world or self, or of hitherto unnoticed relationships between things remote from one another. Or it may take the form of constructing universes of fiction which symbolize aspects of the actual universe. In so far as it is mainly affective and conative, it will consist in the evoking of new appreciations, and in the creation of new and more developed capacities for action.

'Propaganda literature' must be distinguished from mere propaganda, in which there is nothing significantly creative. The writer of mere propaganda is concerned simply to popularize facts, ideas, and emotions with which he is familiar. He uses *clichés* and slogans to produce the desired effect on the minds of his public. The cause which he is serving may happen to be good or bad, momentous or trivial. Of course efficient propaganda in a good cause does produce a development of experience in the public, and is therefore in a sense creative. But in the writer himself, it is not an expression of developing experience, and the activity of producing it does not further develop his experience. However well he does his job, he is merely using sound advertizing technique. But in propaganda that is literature the idea to be propagated is still alive and growing in the writer's own mind. It is a creative influence irradiating and transforming his experience. He is dominated by it, possessed by it. It is a growing shoot which ramifies through his mind. And since he has also an aptitude for verbal expression, he is able to communicate to his public not merely certain ideas, dried and salted and conveniently packed, but a potion which may transform their whole attitude to life. In so far as he does his work efficiently, his efficiency is not that of the artvertizer but that of the artist, whether he uses the direct method of exposition and exhortation, as Ruskin did, or the indirect method of fiction, like Dickens. In either case, and whether the message is true or false, the whole texture of his work will be in the strict sense literature, although its dominant motive is not the developing of experience simply for its own sake.

By literature of release, or 'release literature,' I mean literature in which the dominant motive and main import are neither creation nor propaganda but simply the assuagement of starved needs, the release of pent-up forces in the personality. Now 'creative literature' also affords release to pent-up forces, but it uses these

' releases ' in such ways as to serve its main purpose of clarifying and developing consciousness. Whereas ' creative literature ' may evoke, and also express and satisfy, new and more developed capacities, pure ' release ' literature does nothing of the sort. It merely assuages familiar needs. In this there is nothing creative. Writing which does no more than afford symbolical satisfaction to extant needs cannot be literature. But there is a kind of writing in which, though the main import is sheer ' release,' the manner in which the release is obtained is one which includes a great deal of genuine, though minor and incidental, creation. Thus there are romances, detective stories, thrillers, poems, *belles lettres*, which, though essentially concerned with ' release,' are written with such originality of perception and expression that they have a really quickening effect.

It may, I think, be truly said that, whereas literature of the predominantly creative type generally tends to undermine or transform the conventional system of ideas and values, ' release literature ' in the main accepts them, tacitly and inadvertently. It is creative only in its detailed illustration of the fashionable ideology. There is one purely ' release ' motive, however, which expresses itself in iconoclasm, and dominates a good deal of ' release literature ' in our day. Those who have been seriously irked by authority may develop a need for revolt for its own sake. Those who have suffered under an insincere puritanical morality may crave to deny morality altogether, or to transpose the old ideas of good and evil into their opposites.

A great deal of genuine literature is in the main ' release literature.' And of course an immense amount of writing which is not literature at all is mainly or wholly concerned with ' release.' Even in literature, ' release ' is a quite legitimate function. Incidentally release was probably literature's original office, or the office of that which was later to develop into literature. When wish-fulfilment was sought through magic incantation or bardic stories of the deeds of heroes, the seed of literature was sown. In modern times much poetry (not of the first rank) and many good novels have ' release ' as their main function, witting or unwitting. Rightly we go to literature for symbolical fulfilment of our thwarted capacities, for our craving for adventure, for triumph, for sexual romance, for peace and contemplation, and so on. Literature of

the lighter sort, which is dominated by 'release' may be wholesome both for the writer and the reader, provided that it does not purport to be more creative than it is. Purgation is a necessary function. Moreover the incidental and minor creative power of 'release literature' may benefit a wider public than that which is capable of appreciating literature of a more far-reachingly creative type.

'Escape literature' is less easy to define. And since it is superficially very like 'release literature,' there may be great difficulty in deciding whether a particular piece of writing is essentially 'release' or 'escape.' To say that anyone is an 'escapist' is to charge him with shunning unpleasant reality. Instead of recognizing and grappling with the facts, he either withdraws into some safe corner, where he can live in peace and occupy himself with activities unrelated to the vital struggles of his contemporary world; or else, unable to find actual escape, he solaces himself by constructing a dream world wherein he can live 'in imagination,' a world after his own heart's desire. 'Escape literature,' then, should be literature the main import of which is to protect the mind from unpleasant reality. This essential notion needs qualifying so as to bring it in line with the central ideas of this essay.

In the first place, 'escape literature,' to be literature at all, must of course be in some way significantly creative. Even if its main import is escape from some intolerable aspect of reality, it must in some respect genuinely clarify experience. It may do this by the detailed texture of its thought and expression. It may do it even through its intention as a whole. For instance, even if it constitutes a symbol falsely claiming to be true of reality, the presentation of the symbol may constitute a genuinely creative experience by opening up vistas of possibility. Further, while all literature is to a greater or lesser extent concerned with 'release,' in 'escape literature' release is used with the ulterior motive of escape. It is so employed as to make the fictitious world more attractive and more seeming-real.

From one point of view 'escape literature' is a special kind of 'propaganda literature,' since its main import is to advocate certain ideas and values. There is, however, this difference. In 'propaganda literature' the motive is conscious, whereas in 'escape literature' it is mainly unconscious. The escape motive



is generally an unrecognized fear, which causes an unwitting incapacity to face up to reality. A morbid blindness, a self-protective and perversely creative blindness, not only blots out the obnoxious aspect of reality but also reconstructs the remaining characters into a coherent and lying image. This is the essence of escapism. Even in escape fiction the fantasy, which is in fact a false fantasy, purports to be in some significant manner symbolically true of the real world of men and things.

'Escape literature' may include a great deal of genuine creation, but its main purport is the reverse of creative. It tends to prevent the development of experience, to prevent the mind from facing up to some unpleasant but important aspect of reality. The creative power of the writer is prostituted for an unnatural end, namely to frustrate creation, to distract attention from the way of development. Thus, quite apart from any question of morality, from the purely literary point of view 'escape literature' is a debased kind of literature, since it involves a gross limitation of sensibility and an insincere use of creative power. And from the moral point of view 'escape literature' is bad because it tends to prevent men from facing up to urgent moral problems.

Of the four kinds of literature, or the four kinds of import which any writing may have, I judge 'creation' (as defined) wholly good, and 'escape' wholly bad. In the case of propaganda, moral judgment depends on the goodness of the end preached. Even from a literary point of view propaganda for a bad end, however well done, is to be condemned in so far as it involves a restriction of consciousness to prevent the badness of the bad end from being recognized.

'Release,' as we have seen, is harmless or actually desirable. No doubt, to spend a life-time writing 'release literature' is to deny oneself the greater experiences; but this is true of any respectable and absorbing work. No doubt the writing of 'release literature' may be used to distract the mind from duties; but so may any pursuit. No doubt 'release literature' may be handed out to the young or to the populace to divert them from discovering that society is heading for disaster. On the other hand, the more unsatisfactory a society, the more urgent is it that there should be effective means for 'release,' so that harassed individuals may so far as possible preserve their mental health. The con-

demnation of pure 'release' is not to be justified except when release becomes an addiction or obsession, so that energy which might be used constructively is frittered away. The fact that such addiction to release does so often occur is no reason to censure release as such. In a society which is ripening for revolutionary change pure 'release' is apt to be condemned by the revolutionaries, and regarded as escapism, because it distracts attention from social ills, and thus prevents the gathering of pent-up energy for the revolutionary explosion. But for the individual's mental health 'release' is necessary. And the more exacting a man's life, the more necessary is it that he should have some diversion. Further, the more specialized his work, the more is there in him that needs release. To deny him release is to turn him into a neurotic, a puritan or a fanatic.

So far I have merely discussed in the abstract four possible kinds of import in literature. Is this classification of any practical service? Does it refer to objective characters which literary works actually have? And if so, how are these characters to be detected?

I must leave to literary critics the task of finding out how to assess the creative function of literary works. The fact that the critics so often disagree among themselves does not disturb me. Anything so subtle as the quickening of human minds is bound to be excessively difficult to estimate. To deny that the clarification and development of consciousness is the main function of literature is, in my view, to make nonsense of literary criticism.

The assessing of the 'escape' element in literature cannot be left wholly to the literary critics. The psychologists and sociologists ought to have something to say about it. I hazard a few remarks. The distressing situation which gives rise to escapist activity may be peculiar to the individual, or it may be something inherent in a group or in society as a whole. The extreme case of individual escapism is neurotic fantasy, such as the delusion of grandeur or of persecution, or the symbolical satisfaction of unconscious cravings for mother-love or for triumph over the father. No doubt neurosis in one form or another has often contributed to the creative power of literature. A hidden conflict may goad the mind into vigorous action. Frustration in actual life may strengthen the life of imagination. In spheres of experience that are not blacked out by the repression, neurosis

may quicken sensibility and intelligence. And sometimes the result may be great literature ; but only in so far as the main import of the work is *not* neurotic and *not* simply 'escape.'

For there seem to be two possible reactions to trouble in the unconscious. One course is to acquiesce in the repression, to avoid recognizing that *something* or other is amiss, and to allow the hidden conflict to work upon consciousness without criticism, in fact to give rein to fantasy and spin sweet dreams of wish-fulfilment. In literature this results in typical works of 'release' ; or, if the fantasy purports to be symbolically true of reality, the product is typical 'escape literature.' The other course is to try, however vainly, to probe the self so as to lay bare and solve the hidden conflict, and to see it in its true relation to the rest of the universe. The effort to do this, though it cannot fully succeed in its task, may well produce great creative literature. In 'escape literature,' on the other hand, there is no self-probing, save in safe regions, not inflamed by the hidden conflict ; and no attempt to relate the self's torture to the rest of existence. The resulting work, even if it is executed with literary skill and with a blinkered kind of creative imagination, is in essence merely a protective fiction, falsely purporting to be a true symbol of reality.

The word 'escapism' generally implies flight not from individual but from social troubles. In particular, those whose political opinions are well to the Left, use it to disparage all writing which might distract attention from the need for social change. I have already noted that much which is thus condemned is merely release literature. But undoubtedly there is a great deal of writing, and some of it is literature, which is indeed escapist in the social sense. The criterion of such writing is that its main import is to persuade the reader and the writer himself that after all there is not much wrong with the existing social order, or that God is backing it, and that certain conventional and outworn ideas and valuations, adequate in an earlier phase of society, are also adequate to-day. It was said above that 'release literature' tacitly and inadvertently accepts conventional ideas and values. 'Escape literature' does more than this. It actively asserts them, and at least by implication denies the newer ideas which are appropriate to a changed social situation. I should expect the historian of literature to be able to point to typical 'escape' works in all the

periods of far-reaching social and cultural change.

Escapism of the Right is not the only kind of escapism. A great deal of ardent Left Wing writing is itself, I believe, inspired by the need for escape. Of course its import is escape from a very different aspect of reality from that which is shunned by escapism of the Right. It affords cover not from the need for social revolution but from the need for a revolution in the mind of the writer himself. For revolutionary ardour, though it may and often does spring from genuine zeal to found a better world, sometimes has a very different root. There is a familiar psychological principle according to which unconscious guilt and unconscious inferiority may cause a conscious 'projection' of guilt and inferiority upon some scape-goat. In a good deal of Left Wing writing the discerning critic may find evidence that the author uses the wicked capitalists or the bourgeois class or economic determinism or dialectical materialism as scape-goats to bear the burden of his own sin, or as excuses for his own mental and moral flabbiness. He has in fact constructed, though with an air of 'stark realism,' a fictitious world, which, superficially so like the reality, is false in the same way as the neurotic's delusion is false. It is a dream world. The main import of it is to afford him and his readers a sense that their personal flabbiness and ineffectiveness are the product of forces beyond their control. Whereas for the reactionary escapist true salvation lies in facing the fact that the existing social order and his own part in it are unhealthy and immoral, for the Left escapist it lies in recognizing that his motive for condemning the social order is not as disinterested as he believes. Both are seeking escape from a personal moral challenge; but whereas in the one case the moral imperative is, 'Do something about the social order,' in the other case it may be metaphorically expressed as, 'Do something about the state of your own soul.'

Left escapism is but a special case of the escapism which characterizes so much of modern 'scientific' culture. Accepting the temper of our age, we tend to withdraw attention from the inner life, and to seek escape from individual moral responsibility by constructing a fictitious world in which individuals are wholly the product of external forces, physical or social.

OLAF STAPLEDON.

# COMMENTS AND REVIEWS

## *THE CONTINUANCE OF 'SCRUTINY'*

The reply to the many flattering inquiries that have been made is that the Editors intend to carry on while it remains possible to do so. Under peace-time conditions *Scrutiny* needed all the support it got. It is now not pessimistic to fear that some rise in costs will prove unavoidable ; so that it would certainly not be possible to carry on with less support than in the past—this being hardly a time when appeals can be made for more.

## *'THE TURNING PATH'*

Mr. R. O. C. Winkler writes: 'Owing to my absence from England when you sent me the proofs of my review of *The Turning Path* two unfortunate misprints appeared in quotations from the poems. In one case, the quotations from *Genesis* should of course read

We retch our hearts out, *teasing* the sublime . . . ,

and in the other, from *To a Chinese Girl*, Mr. Bottrall's version has

*Fitly* proportioned pigments will combine . . . '

## CHRISTIAN OR LIBERAL?

*THE IDEA OF A CHRISTIAN SOCIETY*, by T. S. Eliot  
*Faber and Faber*, 5/-).

Addressed to Christians, this book is largely about—and obviously meant to influence—those neutral others who support 'a culture which is mainly negative, but which, so far as it is positive, is still Christian.' Mr. Eliot believes that we must now choose between working for a new Christian culture and accepting a pagan one, whether fascist or communist ; unless we aim at a positively Christian society we are committed 'to a progressive and insidious adaptation to totalitarian worldliness for which the

pace is already set.' Democracy is not an alternative to totalitarian government; it is fundamentally, though perhaps less forthrightly, just as materialistic and pagan. In intention it merely neglects its Christians and has no coherent system of allegiances to a pagan ideal, but it is none the less developing an increasingly complete network of institutions which invite un-Christian conduct from the Christians who find their everyday life set amongst them.

In pointing out the unsatisfactory features of our society Mr. Eliot can count on wide respect and agreement. In his attack on flabbiness of mind, on the lowering of standards in literature and 'culture' in the narrower sense, on the substitution of a mob led by propaganda in place of a community, and in the sort of concern he shows for education, Mr. Eliot implicitly agrees with much that has been expressed in *Scrutiny* for the last seven years; in his disgust at the financial control of politics and his dismay at the plight of agriculture he is on ground familiarized by social credit reformers and their allies.

In common with many other thinkers, Mr. Eliot believes that any remedy for these disorders must involve the establishment of a true community, one in which non-materialist values will find an important place and not just survive in chinks and crannies. Again, like many other thinkers, he describes these values as 'religious.' The society he wants, therefore, is a 'religious-social community,' and at this point he is implicitly in sympathy with ideas that have been put forward in (for me) unfortunate terms by MacMurray. The new responsiveness to the social interests of man (sensitively expressed in technical psychology by Ian Suttie) is at the present time as obligatory for intellectuals as a concern with psycho-analytic discoveries was in the nineteen-twenties; and it is equally unbalanced; but its temporary currency further extends the range of appeal now possessed by valuable ideas of the kind Mr. Eliot puts forward.

His emphasis is markedly on the communal: 'I have tried,' he writes, 'to restrict my ambition of a Christian society to a social minimum: to picture, not a society of saints, but of ordinary men, of men whose Christianity is communal before being individual.' And his ideal is a community in which social custom is maintained by religious sanction: 'a Christian community is one in which there is a unified religious-social code of behaviour.'

It is at this point that the non-Christian's doubts begin to focus. Such societies have been known; and stagnation, oppression, and intolerant regimentation have characterized them. Mr. Eliot, it is true, acknowledges from time to time the need for toleration of the non-Christian and, presumably, toleration within limits of those who question the accepted religious-social code of behaviour and its supporting beliefs. But such toleration has not usually marked the effectively Christian societies of the past. Crude and unfashionable as it is—and bad taste though it may seem to the associates of Christian intellectuals—I decline to forget Galileo and his humbler fellow-victims throughout the Christian centuries, or even the attitude of the contemporary Roman Catholic Church to contraceptives. Religious sanction for social custom and customary belief has always produced such things, and there is no good reason to expect a change. 'To the unreasoning mind,' says Mr. Eliot with sedate surprise, 'the Church can often be made to appear to be the enemy of progress and enlightenment.' It may indeed; and count me among the unreasoning.

I cannot doubt that such a society as Mr. Eliot wants would be heavily overbalanced towards conservation and stability, at the cost of plasticity and exploration. I believe that greater plasticity and bolder exploration of human possibilities are more urgently needed. Talk, with which we half frighten and half flatter ourselves, about the hectic speed of the changes which humanity is undergoing in our century is excited blah. Human nature is, as it always was, remarkably stodgy and in crying need of greater plasticity.

People cannot be plastic, however, unless they are relatively free from anxiety and from guilty fear of the possibilities of their own nature; and freedom from anxiety and guilt is not a thing whose possibility Mr. Eliot convincingly believes in. It is true that he says 'We need to recover the sense of religious fear, so that it may be overcome by religious hope,' but the fear very evidently takes first place and goes along with 'the evil which is present in human nature at all times and in all circumstances.'

All alternatives to this spirit seem to be brought under the heading of what Mr. Eliot calls Liberalism, and hates. His attack is made rather chaotic by sketchy suggestions of the relation between this spirit and political and religious liberalism, and by

the unargued conviction that this general spirit is responsible for all the particular social disorders which disturb him.

But the tags are of little account, and what matters is recognizing the distinction between the 'liberal' spirit and the 'Christian' spirit as Mr. Eliot understands them. As so often happens it can best be expressed in the paradigm which childhood offers. The 'liberal' spirit is the child who explores his world without prejudice and sees no reason to stop exploring; he finds neither the world fundamentally hostile nor himself fundamentally inadequate. The 'Christian' spirit is the child with an intuitive conviction of the world's hostility and his own unworthiness, who (at his best, which Mr. Eliot stands for) concentrates on fortifying himself to overcome—to overcome the world and himself simultaneously. Mr. Eliot's tense and guarded insecurity, beleaguered by the world, is well expressed in his condemnation of 'Liberalism' as 'something which tends to release energy rather than accumulate it, to relax, rather than to fortify.'

The only alternative he sees to Christianity or paganism is a constant departure from, in the sense of a mere rejection of, all positive convictions. This may have been the character of some movements which have been called Liberal. But it is not the only alternative to the religious spirit. What Mr. Eliot ignores or implicitly denies is the possibility of being content with moving on, in a direction given you by the past, to something which has now for the first time become possible and is even more satisfying than your past activities were. This, which is exploration, seems so unsafe to the Christian that he denies its very possibility. His peace of mind depends on the conviction that he knows what he is ultimately aiming at; all his activity must be directed towards a goal which he has already postulated. By this means he escapes the insecurity of being in the strict sense an explorer and becomes instead a pilgrim.

In some temperaments, including apparently Mr. Eliot's, this conviction of an ultimate goal serves paradoxically to reinforce a peculiar gloom. The goal they postulate must be described as unattainable on this earth, since, of course, it is in the nature of human activity that each new development reveals a new and unattained possibility. Simultaneously with becoming better than we were we realize that we could be better than we are. To the



explorer this seems an unsurprising and undisturbing fact. But by concentrating on their postulated goal, those of Mr. Eliot's spirit can see our every advance almost exclusively in the guise of a relative failure. Observe where the emphasis falls in the following passage: 'But we have to remember that the Kingdom of Christ on earth will never be realized, and also that it is always being realized; we must remember that whatever reform or revolution we carry out, the result will always be a sordid travesty of what human society should be—though the world is never left wholly without glory.' The satisfaction of advancing at all is recognized dimly; the satisfaction of seeing that further advance is possible is converted into a disappointment. What is vividly felt is 'the evil which is present in human nature at all times and in all circumstances.' It is this which turns the explorer into an anxious pilgrim.

D.W.H.

## TWENTIETH-CENTURY MUSIC-MAKING

*MUSIC IN THE MODERN WORLD*, by Rollo H. Myers (Arnold, 6/-).

Mr. Myers begins his study by discussing the difficulties involved in all writing about music and explains why music is, to use Roussel's phrase, the 'most hermetic' of the arts. He then proceeds, in chapters on Music and Society and Music and Nationality, to give an excellent account of the changes which came over accepted attitudes to music during the nineteenth century and of the reasons for these changes, leading to a description of the transition from 'patriotic' nationalism to individualism, and of the difference, as 'functional' music, between *Gebrauchsmusik* and, say, a cantata of Bach. The question of the *trahison des clercs* and the relation between music and propaganda are illuminated by some snappy quotations from official documents, particularly one about the notorious case of *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*, and there is an acute passage which, after pointing out the distinction between thematic and stylistic nationalism, places Wagner as the precursor of National Socialism, his Siegfried the Aryan, 'prototype of Germanic youth and the forger of the steel with which Germany is to carve herself a place in the sun.'

The chapter on Music and Humanity distinguishes the physiological from the psychological effect of music and hence approaches the problem of Music and Morality and, more specifically, of musical education both in the wide and in the narrow sense. 'Music and the Listener' considers the question of *how* to listen to music and balances the pros and cons of 'the appalling popularity of music' as a force influencing intelligent listening. 'Music and the Interpreter' deals with the evil of the 'film-star' virtuoso (particularly the conductor), and points out that before the nineteenth century music was not divided into specialized departments; virtuoso and composer were usually inseparable so that one could be interested in the virtuosity while still being interested in the music. (Mr. Myers doesn't mention, however, the important exception of the eighteenth-century *castrati*). This leads into an examination of the relation between music and entertainment in the modern world, with special reference to the sinister appearance of the word 'highbrow,' followed by a consideration of the rival claims of opera and ballet which summarizes fairly the prevailing attitudes of twentieth-century composers towards these forms. ('Both forms are very largely governed by theatrical convention, but ballet shows less desire to compromise with real life than opera, and is therefore, I would say, a purer form of art. Ballet moves in a stylized world of its own, but the operatic convention does not exclude a degree of naturalism which may be ludicrous and is always irksome.'). The book concludes with a brief summary of the trends of contemporary composition and with some speculations about the future.

Mr. Myers's case about the position of music in the modern world will not be new to readers of this periodical; but it is time the case was stated explicitly with reference to music and Mr. Myers states it with a lucidity that makes the greater part (at least) of his book quite distinct from the usual run of writing about music and a serious, if not specifically original, contribution to musical history. The early chapters are all admirable, though occasionally Mr. Myers's phraseology seems to me a little unfortunate. I have, for instance, already explained in these pages<sup>1</sup> that I believe it is misleading to suggest that the emotions aroused by music are '*sui*

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. 'The Textual Criticism of Music,' *Scrutiny*, March, 1939.

*generis* and essentially in a different category from those aroused by the other arts'; it is rather a question of the *degree* of the purity (or non-realism) of the convention; and to a certain extent all music is, or should be, 'determined by natural laws.' Again, while I agree that some sort of musical education along the lines advocated by Mr. Myers is urgently necessary:

' . . . much still remains to be done before the last barriers, which seem to rail off music from the other intellectual activities in which young people in this country are expected to take an interest, have been swept away. When that day comes, music will be practised by every man and woman as a matter of course, and the string quartet may even take the place of bridge as a social pastime. The important thing is that music should not be taught as an "extra" in schools but should form part of the normal curriculum. Moreover, at least equal importance should be attached to the history of music, in outline at any rate, and to rudimentary theory, as to the actual playing of an instrument . . . Music, in fact, should be taught as a living subject, and as one of the great departments of knowledge, not as a mere affair of scales and five-finger exercises on the piano or violin,'

I'm afraid it is too rosily utopian to expect such measures to generate a race of string quartet players. In the first place I think it would be difficult, in the present state of musical education, to find teachers capable of propagating a true musical culture, and in the second place such education—though I repeat it is vitally necessary—could never be more than a substitute for the active, participating, traditional education which, to call upon the stock example, was available to the Elizabethans. Further, although I applaud Mr. Myers's wisdom in refusing to dogmatize as to which kind of listening is the 'right' one, I think he understates the case when he merely says that those who listen to music in the day-dreamer's, the mood-seeker's, or the picture- or story-maker's way are not getting as complete a musical experience as those who 'are able to follow music critically and with some appreciation of the technical and other problems involved,' since technique isn't, surely, the question; the point is that unless one listens to music as music one inevitably responds only to some superficial

and perhaps even fortuitous corruscation of the total experience. One may get 'pleasure' from it, but it is only a pleasure analogous to getting drunk or walking in the rain.

But I do not believe Mr. Myers really disagrees with me on these matters ; I merely think they might have been more clearly expressed. What I find more difficult to understand is how Mr. Myers, after giving an able account of French light music and *opéra bouffe* as exemplified in Offenbach and Chabrier and after making an extremely intelligent plea for a return, in *opéra bouffe*, to the tradition of vocal lyricism (rather than the rhythms of the dance), can evoke the work of Eric Coates and Armstrong Gibbs as the nearest approach to good entertainment music produced in this country. If one wanted an example of the process of 'levelling down' so properly deplored by Mr. Myers one surely couldn't find a better (or worse) one than the popular (and—heaven save us!—professional) acceptance as art *or* entertainment of the dreary manufactured inanities, presumably intended for the delectation of a public of intellectual morons, of the Eric Coates of our music-producing age ; besides, the remark is unfair to Dr. Gibbs who is quite a charming composer and one who can hardly, anyway, be called popular in the Little-by-Little sense at all.

This comment on Coates is disturbing and perhaps unfairly intensifies what seems like a certain glibness in the two chapters dealing with the development of contemporary music. At least these chapters are perfunctory and seem out of place in a book designed for those seriously interested in modern musical activities : I am particularly surprised at Mr. Myers's acceptance of the pigeon-hole method of dealing with composers. For example, in an enthusiastic note on Rubbra Mr. Myers refers to him as a 'neo-romantic.' At first I thought neo-romantic must just mean any modern composer who wasn't neo-classic, because everyone knows that if one isn't Classical one must be Romantic and one can't very well help being Neo anyway. Then I thought that since this meaning didn't seem to mean much at all and since neo-classical seems to apply to composers who neo-ize the conventions of the eighteenth century, perhaps neo-romantic might apply to composers who neo-ize the conventions of the nineteenth-century romantics ; in which case, about Rubbra, it just isn't true. (One doesn't seem to hear of Neo-Polyphonic-Period composers). The

fact that I don't always share the same enthusiasms and dislikes as Mr. Myers—that I'm surprised he finds Ravel an 'intellectual' composer, that I don't agree a bit with his estimate of Bliss and that I believe his lack of sympathy for the pince-nez and Santa Claus whiskers of the Teutonic tradition makes it difficult for him to be fair to Mahler—is of course only a minor matter. But it still seems to me that the pigeon-hole business is not so minor, that it is often dangerous and always unhelpful.

I don't want to cross swords again with Mr. Myers over Stravinsky; but though I agree with much of what he says, particularly about Stravinsky's detachment from personal things, I still don't see that because of these qualities Stravinsky is a great composer. Mr. Myers makes a very instructive comparison with Mallarmé ('Ce n'est pas avec des idées qu'on fait des vers mais avec des mots'), and it seems to me probable that Stravinsky's position in musical history is not unlike that of Mallarmé in the history of literature. He was necessary, he re-established respect for the materials of his art, but it is false to pretend that there is no alternative to complete forgetfulness and indifference of self in the actual musical material other than 'a glorified reflection of one's own misfortunes'; there is between the two the mean of the kind of objectivity—combining the maximum of personality with the maximum of impersonality—which we find in the greatest Bach Choral Preludes or in the Mozart G minor Quintet. We could all add our own examples, and it would not be a tiny list.

Even in these two perfunctory chapters there are, of course, good passages. The section on Stravinsky is good in its way, and so is the section about the atonalists, though I believe it is over-simple. It is only a half-truth to say that atonalism is the negation of tonality and that it has no historical precedent: it is a further intensification of the expressionistic desire to incarnate the 'psychological moment,' a logical development out of chromaticism, particularly the chromaticism of *Parsifal* and *Tristan*. The trouble is that chromaticism itself is, and always has been (*cf.* Gesualdo) essentially a process of disruption, and in order to systematize it an intellectually abstract theory is inevitable, a kind of musical geometry which is out of proportion to, and in perpetual conflict with, the simplest acoustical laws to which the

human voice and the human ear alike interdependently respond, and on which the fundamental principles of melodic lyrical construction are thus necessarily founded. The system is one thing, and it is only a means to an end. The music is another, and it is evidence of the fallacy of the system that the greatest works in it, such as Berg's *Lyric Suite* and Schönberg's *Orchestral Variations* are those that are least dependent on the geometrical rules. Any true musical convention exists of course only in the works that create it ; but it is no accident that the twelve-tone system is the first to claim for itself scientific rather than empirical validity.

The twelve-tone technique is really of enormous importance in any examination of the relation between music and the modern world, and I don't think that Mr. Myers quite brings home the centrality of its position. For not only has it produced some fine music which is the twilight of the expressionistic era but it has polished the battlements of the Ivory Tower so assiduously that the peering eyes of ordinary men and women (if they *should* peer) are dazzled by the transcendental glare ; and it is moreover claimed that to peer is presumptuous, that the outsider just hasn't the right. This doesn't apply so much to Berg who is usually admitted to be the greatest of the atonalists and who, significantly, has to some extent come to terms with his audience ; and it is probably justified in the case of Schönberg and Webern. But for some of the others who haven't quite so much confidence in their unique genius it must be awfully soothing to be able to hold to the twelve-tone commandments with such passionate conviction. The separation of the artist from society could not be carried further ; it is hardly surprising that there should to-day be a reactionary tendency towards a new kind of musical functionalism ; not of course anything like the self-styled Hindemythic Utility Music that nobody in actual fact finds any more useful than the expressionistic wallowings and lucubrations of the duodecuple moron, but music which models, rather than is modelled by, radio, cinema, theatre, various mechanical means of reproduction, even Science.

The future which Mr. Myers foresees for music is not an attractive one. I think it may be true, mainly for economic reasons, that music 'will probably oscillate between great abstraction (absolute music) and complete subservience to extra-musical considerations, just as science in recent years has oscillated between

pure theory and the application of discoveries to practical ends.' And although I don't regard this as an ideal state of affairs I like it better than if the resources of the scientist were to be exploited wholesale by the 'serious' composer, since nothing is more necessary for the health of music to-day than a drastic reduction, rather than an increase, of the resources available to the composer. We must remember, too, this: that whereas we look at each other at very close range, admiring this whimsical smile or deploring that ill-carried bowler, the Future must inevitably take a longer view. The Future will not notice Prince Igor's brand new *Ism*, or at least will not recognize it as such, and it will turn a deaf ear to the Emperor Darius's most modish micro- or poly-tonality. The Future will not observe the latest shift from or to Expression, it will merely hear the music of those few composers who really have something to express. It may be that the drift of civilization, if it does drift, will make it increasingly difficult for these composers to gain a hearing, but I do not think that the creative spirit in those who honestly have a will to create, can be utterly stifled. If it can, then the resources of science as applied to music, won't matter anyway, they will cease to be a nuisance, will become merely of no account. If that day comes Mr. Myers's book will be a no-account too; and perhaps the fact that one reviews it now shows that one hasn't yet relinquished all hope of a more creative human solidarity. But it isn't a hope that governments are likely to include in their War Aims.

W. H. MELLERS.

## PHILOSOPHY AT OXFORD

*AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY*, by R. G. Collingwood (Oxford University Press, 7/6).

Professor Collingwood's autobiography is in part the attempt of a university teacher of philosophy to say what he thinks his job is, and a criticism of many of his colleagues for their conception of that job. It is also the work of a man who believes he has made an important contribution to philosophy. This belief I shall not discuss, but certain allied characteristics of the book should be mentioned for the light they throw on the author. A few quotations will illustrate what I mean.

' For the first time I tasted the pleasure of doing administrative work, and learnt once for all how to do it ' (p. 7). ' If anybody chooses to deny this, I will not try to convince him ' (p. 70). ' I will not be drawn into discussion of what I write. Some readers may wish to convince me that it is all nonsense. I know how they would do it; I could invent their criticisms for myself ' (p. 118). ' Arguments of this kind were no longer even worth refuting, once I knew that " realism " was completely astray as to the nature of history ' (p. 148).

The tone illustrated in these quotations, while it adds to the value of the book as self-portraiture, makes it less valuable as a discussion of problems in the teaching of philosophy. For such a discussion the above-the-battle attitude is not the most helpful. Moreover the solemnity of Collingwood's references to his relations with his colleagues betrays him as seeing himself in the role of rebel against academic tradition—the rebellion being of the kind that depends on the persistence of the thing rebelled against. ' I do not apologize for having felt, when young, the diffidence of youth. At forty, I should not have hesitated for a moment, if I had been attached to a school of thought whose leaders I had convicted of errors so gross on matters of fact so important, to break the attachment ' (p. 22).

For those who have less desire to strike attitudes against a tastefully arranged academic background, the question raised by Collingwood's strictures on the Oxford realists is a more pedestrian one. It is one of evidence, documentation, precision of statement. To treat the last point in detail would lead into excessive technicality, but one reply can be made fairly simply. Oxford realist philosophy is accused of corrupting the idealist tradition of Green and his school in various ways which can be summed up in the phrase ' divorcing philosophy from life.' The realist is represented as saying to his pupils: ' Remember the great principle of realism, that nothing is affected by being known. That is as true of human action as of anything else. Moral philosophy is only the theory of moral action: it can't therefore make any difference to the practice of moral action ' (p. 48). The sophism is plain. That true thinking about moral action is *qua* thinking distinct from and without influence on what it is about seems to me not ' realist dogma ' but obvious truth. But the view that Collingwood foists



on the realists is that the whole activity involved in 'being a moral philosopher' is or ought to be wholly without influence on conduct—which neither follows, nor so far as I know has been thought by any realist to follow, from a realist theory of knowledge. Collingwood must then, appeal, as he proceeds to do, to the actual practice of realist philosophers. 'The pupils,' he says, 'whether or not they expected a philosophy that should give them, as that of Green's school had given their fathers, ideals to live for and principles to live by, did not get it; and were told that no philosopher (except of course a bogus philosopher) would even try to give it. The inference which any pupil could draw for himself was that for guidance in the problems of life, since one must not seek it from thinkers or from thinking, from ideas or from principles, one must look to people who were not thinkers (but fools), to processes that were not thinking (but passion), to aims that were not ideals (but caprices), and to rules that were not principles (but expediency)' (p. 48).

Disproof of such a charge is obviously difficult. But as Collingwood offers no documentation at all (except in so far as the last chapter, on the decline of political thinking and morality in the present century and especially under the present government, counts as such), even a few scattered references that tell in the opposite direction may be of some use. The effect of the realists on their pupils was, according to Collingwood, 'to convince them that philosophy was a silly and trifling game, and to give them a lifelong contempt for the subject' (p. 50). It is true that the reference is primarily to the second generation of realists, and Collingwood himself admits that Cook Wilson, that great figure of the elder generation, was an inspiring teacher (p. 19). But the relation between Cook Wilson and the school of Green (to which Nettleship belonged) is worth driving home in view of Collingwood's representation of it. In his memoir of Cook Wilson, Farquharson says of him: 'Destructive his dialectic was, too polemical perhaps, yet positive and bracing by contrast with those cold negative currents which filled the air; the irony, say, of Arnold or of Nettleship' (*Statement and Inference*, pp. 15-16). And again (p. 883), 'Wilson had a moral repugnance to scepticism in any form.' This is not conclusive. Cook Wilson would not have been the first, if Collingwood were right, to be the unconscious fore-

runner of all he most hated. But it seems clear that in respect of moral earnestness (*not* preaching) Cook Wilson (and I should say his successors) had the advantage, if not of Green (an altogether exceptional figure) at least of such men as Nettleship. And as to the effect of the actual philosophy taught it is enough to refer to Farnell's amusing memoirs, *An Oxonian Looks Back*, where he refers to the 'gift of diffusing darkness' and the 'faculty of "slinging ink"' he acquired under Green's influence. No doubt Farnell was a commonplace mind, and no philosopher. But it is the influence of the different schools on the average pupil that Collingwood is talking about. Similarly, I have heard of a non-philosophical Greats student of the nineteen-hundreds who recently remarked of a distinguished realist that he couldn't be a real philosopher—he only talked common sense.

It is true that an Oxford realist training tends to cause an almost morbid distrust of systematizing in philosophy, and a dislike for jargon that makes certain theories seem nonsensical merely because they are not stateable in terms immediately and transparently intelligible to a mind disciplined to find anything unintelligible that it possibly can. (The point is discussed from a much more anti-realist viewpoint by Mr. Crossman in an able review of Collingwood's book in the *New Statesman* of August 5th). But it is a far cry from this to turning into the 'potential dupes of every adventurer in morals or politics' that Collingwood represents the pupils of a realist training as being.<sup>1</sup>

Collingwood's own conception of the teaching of philosophy as based on 'showing pupils how to read a philosophical text' (p. 74) is interesting and probably fruitful. His charges against Oxford realism of Anti-historicism and weakness in exegesis are largely justified, and his own preference, though it is grounded on his own peculiar view of philosophy, can be defended on more general grounds: that if the history of philosophy is to be studied at all—and there are few who would claim a greater chance of success by starting from scratch and just meditating on the great problems—it ought to be studied historically. If a philosopher is worth studying, one is likely to get more out of him, from a strictly

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<sup>1</sup>And evidence like Farnell's suggests that the destructive work of the 'realists' was called for.

philosophical point of view, by following his thoughts as a whole, than by using isolated portions of his work as pegs on which to hang our own reflections—in Collingwood's words 'trotting out some philosophical question of which the passage vaguely reminds him' (p. 71). (The phrase just quoted has a slightly different bearing in its context.)

The merit and faults of Oxford realist philosophy is perhaps a subject of rather parochial interest. A more general criticism of Collingwood's discussion would be based on its extraordinary neglect of sociological conditions. The thesis that all history is the history of thought, propounded in some admirable pages on historical methodology, may pass muster through its indefiniteness, but when it comes to the concrete application that 'the minute philosophers of my youth . . . were the propagandists of a coming Fascism' it is clear that something is wrong. (For Collingwood is not speaking from the standpoint of a materialistic determinism). In part the defect is a personal one—Collingwood must be in the centre of the stage, therefore his enemies must be cast for the role of principal villains. But there is a deeper defect, of which his contempt for psychology is symptomatic. No doubt it is right to reject the claim of psychology to be a 'science of mind' (p. 94). But Collingwood seems to talk as if our actions were wholly ours as rational beings, as if psychology in being the study of 'such functions as sensation and appetite' were something less than the study of *ourselves* as sentient and appetitive, as if history as the history of thought were merely opposed to and not also based on a genuinely human psychology and sociology. Whether he means to say all this I do not know. But a reading of his philosophy of history raises doubts which are confirmed by the particular applications (*e.g.*, p. 112). In fact, Mr. Crossman's description of Collingwood's philosophy of history as his Ivory Tower is not without point.

It only remains to commend some of the outstanding merits of the book, notably the treatment of political philosophy on pp. 61 ff., the treatment of history as affording training in insight as distinct from the formulation of rules (p. 101), and the description of the *Daily Mail* as 'the first English newspaper for which the word "news" lost its old meaning of facts which a reader ought to know if he was to vote intelligently, and acquired

the new meaning of facts, or fictions, which it might amuse him to read' (p. 155). For such things, and for the essay in historical method given in the chapter on Roman Britain, the book is well worth reading.

J. G. MAXWELL.

## POETRY IN FRANCE

*INTRODUCTION A LA POÉSIE FRANÇAISE, by Thierry Maulnier (Gallimard, 30 fr.).*

M. Maulnier's title raises expectations which are not altogether fulfilled by the book. It is difficult not to feel that its utility has been seriously impaired by an unfortunate choice of method. The book consists of an essay of over a hundred pages on French poetry followed by two hundred pages of selections from French poets which are intended to illustrate his thesis. There is necessarily a gap between M. Maulnier's criticism and his illustrations and the work as a whole tends to be too abstract and general to be a satisfactory 'Introduction.' It is M. Maulnier's own fault if the reader is left wondering whether his critical apparatus is sufficiently good for the job.

The essay is a very unequal performance. It contains some suggestive pages, but much of what M. Maulnier has to say has already been said better and far more concisely by other French critics. At the beginning of the essay he says:

'Une véritable introduction à la poésie française est une introduction à la ressemblance des particularités de chaque poète français.'

This is well said, but it is disconcerting to be told in the next sentence that:

'L'entreprise de ramener Villon et Nerval, Mallarmé et Racine à je ne sais quelle somme de caractères communs qui les définiraient comme poètes français n'aurait très exactement aucun sens.'

In spite of the tell tale 'je ne sais quelle somme,' we may well wonder why not. The work has been done for English poetry, and there seems to be no reason why it should not be done for French poetry.

The first section of the essay deals with poetry in general, and M. Maulnier plunges at once into a series of wordy generalizations which are familiar to readers of his book on Racine. These are specimens of the highflown style that he affects:

‘ Elle (la poésie) est l’incroyable étincelle qui réunit les atomes même du miracle aux atomes de l’extrême nécessité.’

‘ On peut définir au contraire la poésie comme une raison supérieure, à laquelle la raison commune ne suffit pas.’

This sort of statement is carefully punctuated at discreet intervals by such phrases as ‘ *Heidegger dit* ’ and ‘ *Si l’on admet avec Vinci.* ’

The third section of the essay, which deals specifically with French poetry, is more satisfactory. M. Maulnier’s aim is to rehabilitate the sixteenth century at the expense of the nineteenth. There are some good pages on Villon and a stimulating discussion of a number of writers whose work is not well known in this country—Scève, Louise Labé, d’Aubigné and Garnier—but after studying the selections in the second part of the book, some readers may feel that M. Maulnier has spoilt the effect of his criticism by exaggeration. He writes, for example:

‘ Jamais époque n’a été plus riche en poètes du premier rang, jamais les grandes œuvres n’ont été produites en telle profusion, avec tant de générosité, d’abondance créatrice et de joie . . . Scève, Ronsard, Du Bellay, d’Aubigné, Garnier, voguent à pleines voiles dans l’espace enchanté où Baudelaire et Rimbaud ne s’élancent à chaque fois que pour deux ou trois coups d’aile de l’essor condamné d’Icare.’

Some of the writers he mentions, particularly Garnier, were fine poets, but to describe them all sweepingly as ‘ poets of the first rank ’ seems an overstatement. Their vitality was magnificent, but there was also a note of immaturity in their outlook. M. Maulnier describes Garnier as a ‘ French Elizabethan,’ but is apparently unaware of the reservations that the description implies.

It is refreshing to find M. Maulnier dealing firmly with Hugo and Musset in a passage which deserves quotation:

‘ La place de Lamartine, de Hugo, de Vigny, de Musset dans l’histoire de la poésie française ne tardera pas, il faut l’espérer,

à apparaître ce qu'elle fut réellement, c'est-a-dire extrêmement mince . . . Ils bornèrent leur révolution à quelques innovations d'ordre formel, d'ailleurs extrêmement timides. Enfin, ils manquèrent surtout de génie poétique, et c'est par imposture, distraction ou malentendu, qu'ils sont restés, dans l'histoire de la littérature française les types de l'abondance et de la richesse lyrique.'

There are some sensible pages on surrealism, but M. Maulnier—perhaps because of his predilection for the 'vigorous,' 'sensual' poetry of the Renaissance—seems to me to do less than justice to Baudelaire and Rimbaud. Nor is it easy to share his view that the twentieth century is developing into one of the great periods of French poetry.

In an 'Avertissement' which precedes the selections, M. Maulnier declares that his aim is to define 'par les textes même la ligne des hauteurs dominantes de l'histoire poétique française.' The intention is admirable, but the writer appears over-anxious to forestall criticism by adding that he has not tried to produce a new anthology and that while some poems are too well-known for inclusion, others which are nearly as well-known have necessarily been included to illustrate his thesis. This method of selection leads to some curious results.

M. Maulnier devotes nearly half his space to the sixteenth century and this part of the book is the most interesting. With this exception, however, the virtues of the collection are mainly negative. There is only a page or two of Hugo and Musset and nothing from the Parnassians. There are also some strange omissions. There is not a line of Molière whom many French critics consider the most complete representative of the French genius. There is no Verlaine whom M. Maulnier dismisses in his preface as the author of a handful of 'pleasant' poems. It would have been worth including some of Verlaine's best poems if only to illustrate his relation to the lyric poets of the middle ages and the fate of this tradition towards the close of the nineteenth century. We must hope that Corbière and Laforgue are included among 'certain poets whose absence does not in any way imply a judgment on the poetic quality of their work,' for neither will be found in M. Maulnier's pages.

The selections from the poets who are included are often somewhat arbitrary. Corneille is represented by a short passage from his comedy, *Clitandre*, a couple of religious poems and ten pages of extracts from his last play, *Suréna*, which seems to me to have been over-praised by contemporary admirers and can hardly be regarded as typical of Corneille's best manner. It might have passed in an anthology, but not in a selection designed to illustrate the special characteristics of French poetry. Racine does not fare much better. One is glad to have the great speech from *Phèdre*, Act IV, Sc. 1 ('O douleur non encore éprouvée'), but the other passages are more doubtful. There is a well-thumbed passage from *Bérénice* ('Je vois que votre cœur m'approuve en secret')—a play which has long been considered to be inferior to Racine's best work—and some pointless snippets from *Mithridate*, *Iphigénie* and *Athalie*. Many of us would willingly have exchanged some of them for Phèdre's confession in Act I, Sc. 3 ('Mon mal vient de plus loin'), Agrippine's speech in *Britannicus* Act IV, Sc. 2, which is a splendid example of the texture of the great *tirades*, and the dream scene from *Athalie*. M. Maulnier no doubt considered that these belong to the parts of Racine which every French schoolboy is reputed to know by heart; but it could be replied that this after all is an introduction and that in any case poems are included which are almost as well-known to English as to French readers. For example, Villon's 'La Belle Heaumière' is there; it is an admirable illustration of some of the peculiar virtues of French poetry and one would have been glad to have it if it had not been so miserably truncated and so clumsily expurgated that it loses most of its point. Two of Mallarmé's best known poems, *Brise Marine* and *The Swan* are there and so is the *Bateau Ivre* (carefully shorn of what M. Maulnier considers its weaker lines), which makes his claim that he is not producing one more anthology sound thin. The other selections from Baudelaire and Rimbaud seem the more arbitrary in view of the author's statement that (apart from the *Correspondances* and *Voyelles* which are 'too often quoted' for him to include) he has given us the best of both poets.

One's final impression is that a satisfactory 'Introduction' could only take the form of a full-length critical study illustrated by detailed analysis of representative passages. In such a study, the fact that the passages discussed were 'well-known' would be

no objection if a competent critic used them as a means of educating the reader's taste. M. Maulnier's mixture of criticism and anthology creates insurmountable difficulties and to an English reader at any rate smacks too much of 'book-making.'

M.T.

## ROGER FRY AND ART CRITICISM

*LAST LECTURES, by Roger Fry (C.U.P., 21/-).*

To decide how a picture affects us and why the effect of one picture may be better for us than that of another is generally agreed to be more difficult than the parallel problems of literary criticism. One has no unit to start from corresponding to the *word*. While it might be possible to begin a critique of a picture by Cézanne or even Gainsborough from a consideration of their brush strokes, one could not attempt this profitably with the work of Ingres or Leonardo or any fifteenth-century Italian. One must take larger units, line, colour, mass, etc. The European picture is generally admitted to contain a harmonious organization of such elements embodied in natural objects, but the great question of this century has been whether the perception of this sensuous harmony should evoke an emotional harmony or whether we should respond merely on the sensuous plane to the relationship of certain forms, but not to the forms themselves. Which of these is the æsthetic response? Roger Fry supported the first of these propositions in early life and the second later, but he never believed that it might be possible to isolate a specifically 'æsthetic' emotion; his theory remained, as he himself said, 'a purely practical one, a tentative expedient, an attempt to reduce to some kind of order (his) æsthetic impressions up to date.'

Fry's empiricism constitutes his great merit as a critic. He was interested first of all in the concrete, in analysing his feelings before actual works, and he sought all his life for an adequate general method which would render comparison and evaluation possible. Frequent inconsistency is a price well worth paying for such magnificent disinterestedness, such catholicity of taste and such a power of illuminating analysis. The book on Cézanne is perhaps the most impressive product of his scrupulousness, which



here prevented him from going beyond delicate descriptions of technique simply because he was uncertain of the next step. The essay, *Some Questions of Esthetics*, in *Transformations*, is, I think, his least convincing long essay, because he felt bound, for controversial purposes, to be comprehensive and dogmatic, the resultant postulate of an ideal purely plastic work of art being unhelpful in practice and the descriptions of the literary or representational elements in certain pictures discussed being distinctly tendentious. Needless to say, Fry did primarily see the plastic aspects of works of art, but his awareness of and interest in other aspects, though a loss to consistency, is undoubtedly a gain from every other point of view. This dislike and avoidance of fixed methods of analysis reminds one that Fry was equally chary of objective standards of judgment. In *Art-History as an Academic Study*, which begins the book under review, he wanders round the problem for some time before suggesting that we may compare the effects which various works have on us, 'and thus perhaps we may build up a rough working hypothesis of an order of relative values. Although even then we shall gain far more by noting the specific qualities of different experiences and distinguishing them clearly from one another than we can gain by placing them in order of merit' (p. 17). Ultimately no one could claim that any critic's standards were more than 'a working hypothesis,' but these would seem to become more objective in proportion to the discriminating catholicity of his taste. Fry had no need to be so modest.

*Last Lectures* contains Fry's final opinions about the art of Egypt, Mesopotamia, Africa, pre-Spanish America, China, India and Greece, with special reference to the qualities of Sensibility and Vitality on which he bases his comparisons, together with a reasoned and highly reasonable plea for a school of art-history in Cambridge which should also be a school of taste; he was fortunate not to see the more recent architecture, academic and municipal, in both the older universities. The use of photographs of original works, which would be necessary throughout a great part of any conceivable course organized away from London, would raise innumerable small problems of critical tact and adjustment. No doubt Fry had considered this problem, though it is surprising that he several times comments on both painting and sculpture, notably

in the Chinese and Indian sections of the book, of which he had not himself seen the originals. His approach in all the lectures is more that of the *Essay in Aesthetics in Vision and Design*, than that of the essay in *Transformations* just referred to. Though he lays great stress on the quality of Sensibility, or subtly varied rhythm, in all the plastic elements of a picture or statue, his separate analyses suggest that he was moving away from his most austere viewpoint to what one can only call, even at the risk of appearing cheaply patronising, a more comprehensive appreciation. One finds the new interest most satisfactorily expressed when he deals with animal sculpture, for example in the following:

' . . . The ape of King Narmer. No doubt this is a marvellous piece of realistic observation, but it is far more than that ; it has the special quality of vitality, of expressing the inner life of the beast . . . And the treatment is sensitive throughout ; the artist has seized the main plastic relations with extraordinary grip—look at the bony structure of the eye orbit and the bony prominence of the nose—and he has felt the transitions from one plane to another with extreme sensitiveness and stated them with a reticence and subtlety which show how certain he was, how little he felt the need to exaggerate or underline. Moreover he has refused to add any picturesque details either to convince one of the reality of his image or as an excuse for display.' (p. 55).

' Here we have an imitative intuitive understanding of animal life, a marvellous grasp of the essential character expressed in forms of the utmost simplicity so that the plastic sequence is instantly grasped. What makes this so remarkable is the degree to which the observation of nature has been pushed without ever becoming merely descriptive and external. Everything has been assimilated and as it were digested into terms of an inevitable and coherent plastic harmony. Nothing in the natural object has been accepted as merely given ; all has passed through the transmuting power of a creative mind.' (p. 118. A description of one of the gilt bronze bears shown at the Chinese Exhibition).

In describing representations of human beings Fry seems less sure

of his method and of exactly what he is trying to describe. In the following note on a head of Akhenaten by Thutmosis he relates plasticity to representational effect fairly closely:

'Here at least is intense vitality—forms that betray the inner life. And we get a sensibility in the surface modelling of incredible delicacy and finesse and yet the rhythmic harmony is all-pervading and unbroken.' (p. 60).

and in his descriptions of Negro spirit heads he is usually successful, for example:

'In this Negro head the artist has seized on the dome-like dominance of the forehead, and he has found how to support it by increasing immensely the bulging salience of the eyes and, with slight variations, the prominence of the nose; and against these he has played the straight line of the base of the nose and the terrible horizontal prominence of mouth and teeth . . . But what an astonishing grasp of plastic form the head reveals. The sculptor has somehow got behind the facts of appearance. He understands the language of plastic expression so completely that he can create a living human being without any regard to the facts of any existing or even possible human head.' (p. 77)

but he has a tendency to place the two aspects of a work side by side, as he does in this on a Maya head:

'I do not know whether even in the greatest sculpture of Europe one could find anything exactly like this in its equilibrium between system and sensibility, in its power at once to suggest all the complexity of nature and to keep every form within a common unifying principle, *i.e.*, each form taking up and modifying the same theme. The oval is of extraordinary beauty in its subtle variations upon the main idea—you will note how a too exact symmetry is avoided partly by bringing the lock of hair on one side further over the cheek than on the other. There is also, I think, undoubted vitality, a powerful suggestion of the inner life—of a strange tension of spirit—of an almost tragic cast.' (p. 87).

One could quote endless sensitive descriptions of pictures, statues and vases—though some would, of course, be more com-

pletely satisfying than others—and also many felicitous generalizations which draw pages of these together to sum up the essential character of an age or a civilization ; one example of these last must suffice :

‘ If we compare this sinuous and flaccid curve with the controlled energy expressed by the rounded rectangular system of curvature of early Chinese art we get the essential difference between the spiritual attitudes of the two peoples. We shall see other examples that will make this clearer. But what this figure shows also is the extraordinary capacity of these Indian artists to seize and express the most complicated plastic systems. They have perfect freedom of plastic direction. You remember with what hesitating and tentative steps Egyptian and Sumerian sculptors liberated themselves from the flat frontal approaches to the plastic structure of the human figure . . . but this artist who belongs, remember, to the beginning of truly Indian art, can twist his torso at any angle, can relate his limbs to the trunk in any possible pose. In short, his imagination evolves directly and freely in three-dimensional space, whereas the Western artist can only achieve this freedom step by step and as it were by deduction from a series of two-dimensional elevations. This is a very remarkable gift and is one of the chief characteristics of Indian art.’ (p. 152).

Taken as units, the lectures on Egyptian, Negro and Chinese art, with its brilliant aside on Scythian, seem particularly impressive both for range and insight, though only specialists could check the former quality. In discussing Greek art, where he looks upon the quest for a perfect human type as an intellectual interference with the artist’s natural sensibility, Fry refuses to cultivate one epoch more than others and assess each work separately on its own merits, doing more justice than has long been done to the Winged Victory and other fourth century works. I do not feel that Maillol should be used as a standard in sculpture as often as Fry uses him. But the chief interest of the book lies in the particular analyses, and here, though some are obviously hasty lecture notes, I think that it is clear that, with his emphasis on the quality of vitality, Fry was moving towards a more satisfactory account of the nature of representation in art than one finds usually in his previous work.

One sees his admiration for an easily graspable rhythmic unity in both painting and sculpture, but he no longer asserts that representation subserves purely plastic ends ; he comes very near to asserting the opposite. Actually the greater part of his particular criticism, even if we leave out of account the very early work, tends to treat a work of art as 'an endeavour to express an idea rather than to create a pleasing object.' (*Vision and Design*, p. 302).

Fry does not demand vitality as an essential quality of the highest art—one could hardly expect him to—but some of the descriptions in the *Lectures* would have gone a long way to meet Lawrence's caustic gibes at the prophets of Significant Form. Lawrence's *Preface to these Paintings* is written round a theory, which leads him into at least one amazing absurdity, and obviously, despite his wide experience, art criticism was a side-line to him, but nevertheless his criterion, that of the amount of solid living life in a picture, seems to me a valid one. Once again he draws attention to essentials which have been forgotten in the development of critical refinements. After all, the Renaissance Italians did portray life and plenty of it, whereas even Cézanne, as Lawrence points out, painted apples more successfully than people.

It seems to me that the ideal art critic needs both Lawrence's eye for fundamentals and Fry's sensitiveness to the details of technique ; not that Lawrence was insensitive to technique, as he shows in his comments on Cézanne, and, elsewhere, on the Italians, when he relates together the formal aspects of pictures and their subjects very convincingly. Fry is sometimes so concerned with design that he does not merely treat the subject as a thing apart, as one expects, but belittles it altogether. I am thinking of the occasions, for example in his comparison of two pictures of the Marriage of St. Catherine by Fra Bartolomeo in *Transformations* and in an article on Rembrandt's *Bathsheba* in *The Listener* about the time of his death, when he appears to treat the subject of a picture as something which is adequately described by the title ; I say 'appears,' because in his analysis of plastic elements he constantly refers to the forms as human beings and so brings in wider implications of representation at another point. It is also unfortunate that he describes the representational element in pictures as the psychological element in several places. I think that human figures in art can often have great emotional

significance, without being portrayed with much psychological subtlety. Fry compares Brueghel's *Crucifixion* and Poussin's *Ulysses finding Achilles* in this connection. Despite Brueghel's mass of detail and the elaborately individualized faces of his chief characters I don't think he really presents us with a great pictorial 'criticism of life.' Nor does Poussin, but he does communicate certain grave and dignified feelings about a group of human beings, which are ordered by the formal pattern. The idea of vitality developed for the first time in the lectures is altogether more satisfactory. Fry finds it both in the almost abstract Negro spirit head and in the angry-looking Chinese bear; he complains of the lack of it, along with plastic deficiencies as well, in most Greek statues. Again and again Fry describes a statue or a picture as communicating a mood or emotion, and each time by the vitality contained in a plastically satisfying object. The key-word, whether explicit as in the description of the bear, or merely implied, is 'transmutation.' Significant Form should mean natural objects or human beings transmuted into stone or on to canvas, with the stylization, personal or traditional, involved in that process, so that they have an intense symbolic, or perhaps better say metaphorical, significance.<sup>1</sup> The ideal, if one must have one, should not be a perfectly 'pure,' but a perfectly 'impure,' work of art. I don't think it an *a priori* argument to say that it follows that a flower vase cannot have tragic significance; Fry, when he talks about 'the barbaric ruggedness of its jagged projections' in describing a Chou yu, avoids any exaggeration of this kind, though the temptation is obvious. It is also worth mentioning that his admiration for the quality of sensibility never leads him to praise the 'arty and crafty' in the applied arts or 'chinoiserie' of any time or place. It seems to me inevitable that one should have to admit that certain pictures in the Grand Style, such as Raphael's *Transfiguration*, though possessing superbly varied plastic harmonies, are inferior works of art—literary parallels with elaborate prosodic patterns might be cited; Raphael went on to decorate the Sala della Segnatura. We still belong to a Christian tradition and

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<sup>1</sup>Fry's own best analyses tend towards, if they don't always quite reach, this point of view. It is, of course, Lawrence's. Perhaps there is something in Pater on the *Mona Lisa* after all.

therefore could easily appreciate the feeling of the *Transfiguration* as at least a possible aspect of experience, if there were really any there—we can accept El Greco's ecstatic visions. A real problem arises in the case of Negro, Maya and even sometimes Chinese art, where contact is much more difficult with anything but the most general human significance expressed. I think we can only recognize it as a problem and console ourselves with a thought of the *Waste Land* and the eclecticism of our civilization. Fry's ostrich behaviour and talk of the universal language of form really makes the problem more acute.

It remains to thank Sir Kenneth Clark and his anonymous assistant for making the *Lectures* and their illustrations permanently available. Sir Kenneth Clark introduces the book with an excellent critical survey of Fry's artistic outlook.

GEOFFREY WALTON.

## HOLLYWOODEN HERO

*THE FIFTH COLUMN*, by Ernest Hemingway (Cape, 10/6).

The ox, as a literary hero, is no longer *à la mode*, and Mr. Hemingway himself has grown a little dusty. He has never again dazzled the literary skyline with another such rocket as *A Farewell to Arms*, and it would indeed be difficult to imagine a pyrotechnic display more cunningly engineered to elicit the goggle-eyed oohs and ahs of a wider diversity of ill-assorted spectators. The high-brows ahd knowingly because the book had, or seemed to have, an Original Technique; the low-brows oohed excitedly because it was outspoken, a rattling war-cum-sex yarn, yet tragic too. And now the rocket has collapsed in ashes, nor has a re-issue in the Penguin Library done more than feebly re-animate the relics with a tawdry glow. Yet if it was overpraised as a work of art, and if Mr. Hemingway's growing reputation as Professional Clown and Tough Guy to the Great American Public has rather obscured his qualities as a writer,<sup>1</sup> it does not follow that he has none, or that they are uninteresting. *A Farewell to Arms* still seems to me a accomplished book, for whether it is valuable and whether it is

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<sup>1</sup>We in England find it difficult to understand or even to realize the nature of the peculiar mythology which America erects around its tame artists-cum-entertainers. In this connection a remarkable

false are two distinct questions which are often treated as though they were one.

In saying that it is accomplished I mean that it is competent with the slickness of the tougher type of Hollywood film. It is often said that Hollywood emotion is essentially synthetic but this, though true, is not the whole truth. It is wrong to assume that glycerine tears, because they are often inadequately motivated and always unsubtle, because they lack sensibility and hence any of the real passion that cannot exist apart from sensibility, have therefore no motivation at all ; it is wrong to put all the blame on Hollywood for tapping the glycerine vats in people's hearts and none on people for possessing those vats waiting to be tapped at ; and we must remember too that though there is much that is deliberately vicious in glycerine tears yet a form of art or entertainment so popular and universal cannot exist without incarnating, even if fortuitously, some of the values which the people who patronize it honestly live by.

Of course, to the intelligent and sensitive—to the Cultured Minority—toughness seems merely the most complacent form of stupidity, the reverse of being 'grown up,' rather an emotional immaturity, an inability to handle situations and experiences except by denying their validity. Yet it is only the complexity and difficulty of emotional experience that toughness denies, not emotion itself, for at heart toughness battens on virtues extravagantly soft, extravagantly sad and rather foolish. One believes in the simplest kind of sexual love and in intoxication ; one takes an exhibitionist delight in manifestations of mechanic skill, whether in driving a car or slaughtering an animal ; one holds steadfastly by courage (in the face of bulls, lions, guns, gangsters, women scorned and people who do not play the game), by sacrifice, and by a primitive kind of honour. It is true that one must not mention honour or courage or sacrifice by their names :

' I was always embarrassed by the words sacred, glorious and sacrifice, and the expression in vain. We had heard them sometimes standing in the rain almost out of earshot, so that

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document recently published with much munificence under the title of *The George Gershwin Memorial Volume* deserves the closest scrutiny.



only the shouted words came through, and had read them, on proclamations that were slapped up by billposters over other proclamations, now for a long time and I had seen nothing sacred and the things that were glorious had no glory and the sacrifices were like the stockyards at Chicago if nothing was done with the meat except to bury it . . . There were many words that you could not stand to hear and finally only the names of places had dignity ;'

but to admit fear of them is to admit belief in their existence, and it is the essence of the code that one must not whine, must accept what life offers fatalistically (' So this is what it's going to be like. Well, this is what it's going to be like, then' . . . ' No pleasure in anything if you mouth it up too much.'). How simple and how extravagantly emotional the values of toughness really are is revealed not only in the love story of *A Farewell to Arms* but also in such quasi-satirical stories about the warping of natural desire as *Mr. and Mrs. Elliot*, *A Canary for One* and *A Very Short Story* ; while it is stated explicitly in a passage from the first chapter of the book about bull-fighting :

' So far about morals, I know only one, that what is moral is what you feel good after and what is immoral is what you feel bad after and judged by these moral standards, which I do not defend, the bull-fight is very moral to me because I feel very fine while it is going on and have a feeling of life and death and mortality and immortality, and after it is over I feel very sad but very fine.'

Now you can consider this as amoral as you like, yet it is idiotic to say that for millions of people—though I do not mean specifically about bulls—it is, any more than the glycerine values of the cinema, false. Rather is it terrifyingly true, as true as the banal simplicity of Mr. Hemingway's prose. The infantile repetitions of dialogue in the story *Hills like White Elephants*, with its pathetic-bathetic ' I feel fine ' conclusion, indicates how it is precisely the banality of the greater part of human experience, especially when it seems most intense, that Mr. Hemingway renders with such sinister acumen. And in this passage from *A Farewell to Arms* :

' If people bring so much courage to this world, the world has to kill them to break them, so of course it kills them. The

world breaks everyone and afterward many are strong in the broken places. But those that will not break it kills. It kills the very good and the very gentle and the very brave impartially. If you are none of these you can be sure that it will kill you too but there will be no special hurry'—

even the sly, the dexterous tug at the heart-strings in the rhythm of the penultimate clause is honest in the sense that it is true, for we are none of us quite honest in our emotions, quite free from a self-pity that warps, staging them with a theatrical and appealing gesture. Hollywood and Mr. Hemingway's stories both genuinely represent an epoch in the history of human feeling—the situation in the last scene of Mr. Hemingway's play *The Fifth Column* is itself one of Hollywood's ripest chestnuts except that of course Mr. Hemingway does not tack on the usually quite fortuitous happy ending; but there is this great difference between Hollywood and Mr. Hemingway, namely that whereas these values exist in the cinema only among much that is flabby, amorphous, infantile and adulterated, Mr. Hemingway presents them with the neatness, the concentration of a true if limited artist. This is really all people mean when they talk about Mr. Hemingway's gift for understatement. Every true artist has a 'gift for understatement' and if Mr. Hemingway's statement seems peculiarly under, that is merely because he has such a very simple statement to start from. It is at least a sort of tribute if we can say of Mr. Hemingway that, for the social historian, he makes Hollywood unnecessary.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Mr. Hemingway's own account of the 'understatement' of his art is given in a well-known passage from *Death in the Afternoon*:

'If a writer of prose knows enough about what he is writing about he may omit things that he knows and the reader, if the writer is writing truly enough, will have a feeling of those things as strongly as though the writer had stated them. The dignity of movement of an ice-berg is due to only one-eighth of it being above water. A writer who omits things because he does not know them only makes hollow places in his writing. A writer who appreciates the seriousness of writing so little that he is anxious to make people see that he is formally educated, cultured or well-bred is merely a popinjay.'

I have already indicated that the Hemingway values, as applied to human behaviour, are in the main negative—one does *not* whine, one does *not* give in, one does *not* betray one's trust: and that in so far as they are positive they depend almost entirely on sensation—on delight in food and drink and women, in high speed and mechanic skill, in clean leaves and cool sheets, in tactile impressions and the sharp precision of landscape, particularly landscapes that are sunlit and frosty and sharply defined. (Mr. Hemingway's 'reporter's eye' as an aspect of descriptive technique, of which I shall have more to say later, is here relevant). The reason for this is that the Hemingway values are not the sort of values on which human relationships could be based or by which a community could live for long. In this respect it is significant that the background to Mr. Hemingway's stories is almost always one of war and sudden death, not because he has any delight in, let alone understanding of, the simple violent realities of life and death in themselves—the amiably grim journalistic irony of *A Natural History of the Dead* shows no concern for the problem of death or the passion and suffering entailed in it—but merely because his values are such that they can live only in the midst of destruction, being the values of a disintegrating society: in other words they are a means of avoiding the complexity of human relations, of avoiding the necessity of living. I think there is probably—behind the grosser superficialities, the more obvious symptoms of disintegration—a similar significance in the extreme simplicity of the values of the cinema; I am quite certain that it is the essence of the characteristic Hemingway situation.

This situation is stated patently in many of the stories about soldiers—for instance *Soldiers' Home*:

'Vaguely he wanted a girl but he did not want to have to work to get her. He did not want to get into the intrigue and politics . . . he did not want any consequences ever again. He wanted to live along without consequences . . . he would not go through all the talking . . . he had tried so to keep his life from being complicated.'

Other values may perhaps be hinted at, values more satisfying and even superior, as in the stories about the Swiss or references to the Catholic tradition in the portrait of the priest in *A Farewell*

to Arms, but it is always suggested that however sympathetic they are naïve, unreal, helpless in a disintegrating world. Should Mr. Hemingway ever indicate any conception of a better or happier life it is merely an intensification of the 'good' things in the present one, the things that make you Feel Fine: it is conceived, that is, like the account of bull-fighting which I have quoted earlier, entirely, entirely in terms of sensation. One of Mr. Hemingway's most perfect and most touching stories, *A Clean Well-lighted Place*, emphasizes this point. The 'very old man walking unsteadily but with dignity,' the outcast cosmopolitan ('last week he tried to commit suicide. Why? He was in despair. What about? Nothing. How do you know it was nothing? He has plenty of money'); the waiter who would return to his wife; the other waiter who has only his insomnia to return to; these are all the stock Hemingway counters.

" 'We are two of different kinds,' the old waiter said . . .

" 'It is not only a question of youth and confidence, although these things are very beautiful. Each night I am reluctant to close up because there may be someone who needs the café.'"

" 'Hombre, there are bodegas open all night long.'"

" 'You do not understand. This is a clean and pleasant café.'"

" 'It is well lighted. The light is very good, and also, now, there are the shadows of the leaves . . . It is the light of course but it is necessary that the place be clean and pleasant. You do not want music. Certainly you do not want music. Nor can you stand before a bar with dignity although that is all that is provided for these hours. What did he fear? It was not fear or dread. It was a nothing that he knew too well. It was all a nothing and a man was a nothing too. It was only that and light was all it needed and a certain cleanness and order.' "

You see it is no accident that so many of Mr. Hemingway's stories, if they do not take place in wars, have their setting in hotels, bars, or the waiting rooms of railway stations. The inhabitants of the Hemingway world are all homeless, and though they have neither confidence nor youth of spirit they believe, sentimentally but with melancholy honesty, that these qualities are 'very beautiful.' They wish above all to accept their homelessness and

disillusion 'with dignity' and a stiff upper lip, and to be able to do so they ask little more than an average allowance of sensory and material comfort and cleanness and order. Nearly all the best stories in this volume deal with resignation in face of the biffs life gives one or—and perhaps the two are hardly separable—in face of the failure of an excessively simple scale of values. The quiet conclusion of *A Clean Well-lighted Place* ('"After all," he said to himself, "it is probably only insomnia. Many must have it"') is typical, as is the behaviour of the major (of the story *In Another Country*) whose young wife has suddenly died:

'He stood there, biting his lower lip. "It is very difficult," he said, "I cannot resign myself."

'He looked straight past me and out through the window. Then he began to cry. "I am utterly unable to resign myself," he said, and choked. And then crying, his head up looking at nothing, carrying himself straight and soldierly, with tears on both his cheeks and biting his lips, he walked past the machines and out the door.

'The major did not come back to the hospital for three days. When he came back, there were large framed photographs around the wall, of all sorts of wounds before and after they had been cured by the machines. In front of the machine the major used were three photographs of hands like his that were completely restored. I do not know where the doctor got them. I always understood we were the first to use the machines. The photographs did not make much difference to the major because he only looked out of the window.'

These things are typical and so is the peculiarly drab prose in which this resignation is incarnated. This is Mr. Hemingway's contribution to literature and if too topical and local to be permanent I think it is none the less a real one.

In trying to understand the means whereby Mr. Hemingway effects this incarnation we have first to consider his 'reporter's eye.' 'I was trying to write then,' he says in *Death in the Afternoon*, 'and I found the greatest difficulty aside from knowing truly what you really felt, rather than what you were supposed to feel, and had been taught to feel, was to put down what really happened in action: what the actual things were that produced the

emotion you experienced. In writing for a newspaper you told what happened and, with one trick and another you communicated the emotion aided by the element of timeliness which gives a certain emotion to any account of something that has happened on that day: but the real thing, the sequence of motion and fact which made the emotion and which would be as valid in a year or in ten years or, with luck and if you stated it purely enough, always, was beyond me, and I was working very hard to get it.' Here I think we can see the fundamentals of Mr. Hemingway's method, and also we can see how different they are from those of William Faulkner, a writer with whom he is often considered comparable. Faulkner tries to give a scrupulously realistic account of commonplace or even subnormal experience, but throughout so artificially intensifies the experience that it becomes a dishonest perversion. It is not merely that life is *not* like that, that the casual circumstance is not pregnant with such violent electrical cross-currents, but the dishonesty takes the form of an attempt to pump tragic significance into a conception of life that is quite as banal as Hemingway's, and much more confused. Thus not only is its experimental technique (mainly a matter of interspersing straightforward statements with unnecessary clauses) factitious, but also its imaginative conception is chaotic—it is written from all points of view and none. Mr. Hemingway has his own brisk answer to this kind of Literature:

'No matter how good a phrase or a simile a writer may have if he puts it in where it is not absolutely necessary and irreplaceable he is spoiling his work for egotism. Prose is architecture, not interior decoration, and the Baroque is over . . .

'This too to remember. If a man writes clearly enough anyone can see if he fakes. If he mystifies to avoid a straight statement, which is very different from breaking so-called rules of syntax or grammar to make an effect which can be obtained in no other way, the writer takes a longer time to be known as a fake and other writers who are afflicted by the same necessity will praise him in their own defence. True mysticism should not be confused with incompetence in writing which seeks to mystify where there is no mystery but is really only the necessity to fake to cover lack of knowledge or the inability to state clearly.

Mysticism implies a mystery and there are many mysteries ; but incompetence is not one of them ; nor is overwritten journalism made literature by the injection of a false epic quality. Remember this too : all bad writers are in love with the epic.'

I think it is a good answer if a simple one, and in its bluff way it really is consistent with Mr. Hemingway's practice. For though his reporter's eye may not see very much it sees what it does see very clearly—clearly enough to make his 'realism' not realistic but merely an acceptable literary convention. It is easy to see in such a passage as this :

'We were in the garden at Mons. Young Buckley came in with his patrol from across the river. The first German I saw climbed up over the garden wall. We waited till he got one leg over and then we potted him. He had so much equipment on and looked awfully surprised and fell down into the garden. Then three more came over farther down the wall. We shot them. They all came just like that,'

or in such tiny tales as *On the Quai at Smyrna* and *The Revolutionist* how Mr. Hemingway uses the description of facts and incidents in the simplest language and most banal rhythms as a personal convention reconcilable with the characteristic Hemingway virtues of resignation, fatalism, and fortitude in the face of physical and occasionally mental suffering ; while in *Old Man at the Bridge* we see the process carried a step further—a piece of reporting transformed, by *selection* of detail and control of rhythm, into a Hemingway situation, into a kind of minor art. I think it is clear from this story that Hemingway's prose, however colloquial, is no more realistic than, and as conventional as, that of (say) Meredith. This, for instance, may be based on the movement of speech :

'There was nothing to do about him. It was Easter Sunday and the Fascists were advancing towards the Ebro. It was a grey overcast day with a low ceiling so that their planes were not up. That and the fact that cats know how to look after themselves was the only good luck that old man would ever have.'

but essentially it is speech stylized for a specific end. So too, and much more obviously, is the private language, always consistent

with the Hemingway virtues, which is spoken by Mr. Hemingway's heroines, where the extreme limitation of the stylization is the condition of the intention being clearly realized. ('You'll kill him marvellously,' she said, 'I know you will. I'm awfully anxious to see it.'). Even when Mr. Hemingway dabbles in the Steinian trick as he does occasionally in order to express states of drunkenness coition or hysteria, he does so strictly within the limits of his own convention, and not in a flatulent gallimaufry of everyone else's conventions that is supposed, as in Faulkner, to be realistic. You may think it awfully boring to be all the time making love and awfully brave and maybe awfully drunk, yet it's an awfully big thing and it's no use shutting your eyes to it.

'I was trying to learn to write, commencing with the simplest things, and one of the simplest things of all and the most fundamental is violent death . . . I had read many books in which, when the author tried to convey it, he only produced a blur, and I decided that this was because either the author had never seen it clearly or, at the moment of it, he had physically or mentally shut his eyes, as one might do if he saw a child he could not possibly reach or aid about to be struck by a train.'

It is Mr. Hemingway's achievement that, in a fashion rather different from his intention, he really has presented us with the picture of a kind of death, and that he has done so without 'blur.' The death which is the Hemingway mentality is closer to us to-day than it has ever been, and it is stated in his art with the greatest possible neatness and condensation. We can take it or leave it; but we run the risk of being blurred ourselves if we try to be grateful to him and sad about him at one and the same time.

W. H. MELLERS.



# SCRUTINY

## A Quarterly Review

*Edited by*

D. W. HARDING      L. C. KNIGHTS      F. R. LEAVIS

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# REGULATED HATRED :

## AN ASPECT OF THE WORK OF JANE AUSTEN<sup>1</sup>

### I.

THE impression of Jane Austen which has filtered through to the reading public down from the first-hand critics, through histories of literature, university courses, literary journalism and polite allusion, deters many who might be her best readers from bothering with her at all. How can this popular impression be described? In my experience the first idea to be absorbed from the atmosphere surrounding her work was that she offered exceptionally favourable openings to the exponents of urbanity. Gentlemen of an older generation than mine spoke of their intention of re-reading her on their deathbeds; Eric Linklater's cultured Prime Minister in *The Impregnable Women* passes from surreptitious to abandoned reading of her novels as a national crisis deepens. With this there also came the impression that she provided a refuge for the sensitive when the contemporary world grew too much for them. So Beatrice Kean Seymour writes (*Jane Austen*): 'In a society which has enthroned the machine-gun and carried it aloft even into the quiet heavens, there will always be men and women—Escapist or not, as you please—who will turn to her novels with an unending sense of relief and thankfulness.'

I was given to understand that her scope was of course extremely restricted, but that within her limits she succeeded admirably in expressing the gentler virtues of a civilised social order. She could do this because she lived at a time when, as a sensitive person of culture, she could still feel that she had a place in society and could address the reading public as

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<sup>1</sup>A paper read before the Literary Society of Manchester University, March 3rd, 1939.

sympathetic equals; she might introduce unpleasant people into her stories but she could confidently expose them to a public opinion that condemned them. Chiefly, so I gathered, she was a delicate satirist, revealing with inimitable lightness of touch the comic foibles and amiable weaknesses of the people whom she lived amongst and liked.

All this was enough to make me quite certain I didn't want to read her. And it is, I believe, a seriously misleading impression. Fragments of the truth have been incorporated in it but they are fitted into a pattern whose total effect is false. And yet the wide currency of this false impression is an indication of Jane Austen's success in an essential part of her complex intention as a writer: her books are, as she meant them to be, read and enjoyed by precisely the sort of people whom she disliked; she is a literary classic of the society which attitudes like hers, held widely enough, would undermine.

In order to enjoy her books without disturbance those who retain the conventional notion of her work must always have had slightly to misread what she wrote at a number of scattered points, points where she took good care (not wittingly perhaps) that the misreading should be the easiest thing in the world. Unexpected astringencies occur which the comfortable reader probably overlooks, or else passes by as slight imperfections, trifling errors of tone brought about by a faulty choice of words. Look at the passage in *Northanger Abbey* where Henry Tilney offers a solemn reprimand of Catherine's fantastic suspicions about his father:

' Dear Miss Morland, consider the dreadful nature of these suspicions you have entertained. What have you been judging from? Remember the country and the age in which we live. Remember that we are English, that we are Christians. Consult your own understanding, your own sense of the probable, your own observation of what is passing around you. Does our education prepare us for such atrocities? Do our laws connive at them? Could they be perpetrated without being known, in a country like this, where social and literary intercourse is on such a footing, and where roads and newspapers lay everything open? '

Had the passage really been as I quote it nothing would have been out of tone. But I omitted a clause. The last sentence actually runs: 'Could they be perpetrated without being known, in a country like this, where social and literary intercourse is on such a footing, where every man is surrounded by a neighbourhood of voluntary spies, and where roads and newspapers lay everything open?' 'Where every man is surrounded by a neighbourhood of voluntary spies'—with its touch of paranoia that surprising remark is badly out of tune both with 'Henry's astonishing generosity and nobleness of conduct' and with the accepted idea of Jane Austen.

Yet it comes quite understandably from someone of Jane Austen's sensitive intelligence, living in her world of news and gossip interchanged amongst and around a large family. She writes to Cassandra (September 14th, 1804), 'My mother is at this moment reading a letter from my aunt. Yours to Miss Irvine of which she had had the perusal (which by the bye in your place I should not like) has thrown them into a quandary about Charles and his prospects. The case is that my mother had previously told my aunt, without restriction, that . . . whereas you had replied to Miss Irvine's inquiries on the subject with less explicitness and more caution. Never mind, let them puzzle on together.' And when Fanny Knight (her niece) writes confidentially about her love affair, Jane Austen describes ruses she adopted to avoid having to read the letter to the family, and later implores Fanny to 'write *something* that may do to be read or told' (November 30th, 1814).

Why is it that, holding the view she did of people's spying, Jane Austen should slip it in amongst Henry Tilney's eulogies of the age? By doing so she achieves two ends, ends which she may not have consciously aimed at. In such a speech from such a character the remark is unexpected and unbelievable, with the result that it is quite unlikely to be taken in at all by many readers; it slips through their minds without creating a disturbance. It gets said, but with the minimum risk of setting people's backs up. The second end achieved by giving the remark such a context is that of off-setting it at once by more appreciative views of society and so refraining from indulging an exaggerated bitterness. The eulogy of the age is not nullified by the bitter clause, but neither

can it wipe out the impression the clause makes on those who attend to it.

One cannot say that here the two attitudes modify one another. The technique is too weak. Jane Austen can bring both attitudes into the picture but she has not at this point made one picture of them. In *Persuasion* she does something of the same kind more delicately. Miss Elliot's chagrin at having failed to marry her cousin is being described in the terms of ordinary satire which invites the reading public to feel superior to Miss Elliot:

' There was not a baronet from A to Z whom her feelings could have so willingly acknowledged as an equal. Yet so miserably had he conducted himself, that though she was at this present time (the summer of 1814) wearing black ribbons for his wife, she could not admit him to be worth thinking of again. The disgrace of his first marriage might, perhaps, as there was no reason to suppose it perpetuated by offspring, have been got over, had he not done worse ; '

—and then at this point the satire suddenly directs itself against the public instead of Miss Elliot—

' but he had, as by the accustomed intervention of kind friends they had been informed, spoken most disrespectfully of them all . . . '

In *Emma* the same thing is done still more effectively. Again Jane Austen seems to be on perfectly good terms with the public she is addressing and to have no reserve in offering the funniness and virtues of Mr. Woodhouse and Miss Bates to be judged by the accepted standards of the public. She invites her readers to be just their natural patronising selves. But this public that Jane Austen seems on such good terms with has some curious things said about it, not criticisms, but small notes of fact that are usually not made. They almost certainly go unnoticed by many readers, for they involve only the faintest change of tone from something much more usual and acceptable.

When she says that Miss Bates ' enjoyed a most uncommon degree of popularity for a woman neither young, handsome, rich, nor married, this is fairly conventional satire that any reading public would cheerfully admit in its satirist and chuckle over. But the

next sentence must have to be mentally re-written by the greater number of Jane Austen's readers. For them it probably runs, 'Miss Bates stood in the very worst predicament in the world for having much of the public favour; and she had no intellectual superiority to make atonement to herself, or compel an outward respect from those who might despise her.' This, I suggest, is how most readers, lulled and disarmed by the amiable context, will soften what in fact reads, '. . . and she had no intellectual superiority to make atonement to herself, or frighten those who might hate her into outward respect.' Jane Austen was herself at this time 'neither young, handsome, rich, nor married,' and the passage perhaps hints at the functions which her unquestioned intellectual superiority may have had for her.

This eruption of fear and hatred into the relationships of everyday social life is something that the urbane admirer of Jane Austen finds distasteful; it is not the satire of one who writes securely for the entertainment of her civilised acquaintances. And it has the effect, for the attentive reader, of changing the flavour of the more ordinary satire amongst which it is embedded.

*Emma* is especially interesting from this point of view. What is sometimes called its greater 'mellowness' largely consists in saying quietly and undisguisedly things which in the earlier books were put more loudly but in the innocuous form of caricature. Take conversation for instance. Its importance and its high (though by no means supreme) social value are of course implicit in Jane Austen's writings. But one should beware of supposing that a mind like hers therefore found the ordinary social intercourse of the period congenial and satisfying. In *Pride and Prejudice* she offers an entertaining caricature of card-table conversation at Lady Catherine de Bourgh's house.

'Their table was superlatively stupid. Scarcely a syllable was uttered that did not relate to the game, except when Mrs. Jenkinson expressed her fears of Miss de Bourgh's being too hot or too cold, or having too much or too little light. A great deal more passed at the other table. Lady Catherine was generally speaking—stating the mistakes of the three others, or relating some anecdote of herself. Mr. Collins was employed in agreeing to everything her ladyship said, thanking her for every fish he

won, and apologising if he thought he won too many. Sir William did not say much. He was storing his memory with anecdotes and noble names.'

This invites the carefree enjoyment of all her readers. They can all feel superior to Lady Catherine and Mr. Collins. But in *Emma* the style changes: the talk at the Cole's dinner party, a pleasant dinner party which the heroine enjoyed, is described as ' . . . the usual rate of conversation; a few clever things said, a few downright silly, but by much the larger proportion neither the one nor the other—nothing worse than everyday remarks, dull repetitions, old news, and heavy jokes.' 'Nothing worse'!—that phrase is typical. It is not mere sarcasm by any means. Jane Austen genuinely valued the achievements of the civilisation she lived within and never lost sight of the fact that there might be something vastly worse than the conversation she referred to. 'Nothing worse' is a positive tribute to the decency, the superficial friendliness, the absence of the grosser forms of insolence and self-display at the dinner party. At least Mrs. Elton wasn't there. And yet the effect of the comment, if her readers took it seriously would be that of a disintegrating attack upon the sort of social intercourse they have established for themselves. It is not the comment of one who would have helped to make her society what it was, or ours what it is.

To speak of this aspect of her work as 'satire' is perhaps misleading. She has none of the underlying didactic intention ordinarily attributed to the satirist. Her object is not missionary; it is the more desperate one of merely finding some mode of existence for her critical attitudes. To her the first necessity was to keep on reasonably good terms with the associates of her everyday life; she had a deep need of their affection and a genuine respect for the ordered, decent civilisation that they upheld. And yet she was sensitive to their crudenesses and complacencies and knew that her real existence depended on resisting many of the values they implied. The novels gave her a way out of this dilemma. This, rather than the ambition of entertaining a posterity of urbane gentlemen, was her motive force in writing.

As a novelist, therefore, part of her aim was to find the means for unobtrusive spiritual survival, without open conflict with the

friendly people around her whose standards in simpler things she could accept and whose affection she greatly needed. She found, of course, that one of the most useful peculiarities of her society was its willingness to remain blind to the implications of a caricature. She found people eager to laugh at faults they tolerated in themselves and their friends, so long as the faults were exaggerated and the laughter 'good-natured'—so long, that is, as the assault on society could be regarded as a mock assault and not genuinely disruptive. Satire such as this is obviously a means not of admonition but of self-preservation.

Hence one of Jane Austen's most successful methods is to offer her readers every excuse for regarding as rather exaggerated figures of fun people whom she herself detests and fears. Mrs. Bennet, according to the Austen tradition, is one of 'our' richly comic characters about whom we can feel superior, condescending, perhaps a trifle sympathetic, and above all heartily amused and free from care. Everything conspires to make this the natural interpretation once you are willing to overlook Jane Austen's bald and brief statement of her own attitude to her: 'She was a woman of mean understanding, little information, and uncertain temper.' How many women amongst Jane Austen's acquaintance and amongst her most complacent readers to the present day that phrase must describe! How gladly they enjoy the funny side of the situations Mrs. Bennet's unpleasant nature creates, and how easy it is made for them to forget or never observe that Jane Austen, none the less for seeing how funny she is, goes on detesting her. The thesis that the ruling standards of our social group leave a perfectly comfortable niche for detestable people and give them sufficient sanction to persist, would, if it were argued seriously, arouse the most violent opposition, the most determined apologetics for things as they are, and the most reproachful pleas for a sense of proportion.

Caricature served Jane Austen's purpose perfectly. Under her treatment one can never say where caricature leaves off and the claim to serious portraiture begins. Mr. Collins is only given a trifle more comic exaggeration than Lady Catherine de Bourgh, and by her standards is a possible human being. Lady Catherine in turn seems acceptable as a portrait if the criterion of verisimilitude is her nephew Mr. Darcy. And he, finally, although



to some extent a caricature, is near enough natural portraiture to stand beside Elizabeth Bennet, who, like all the heroines, is presented as an undistorted portrait. The simplest comic effects are gained by bringing the caricatures into direct contact with the real people, as in Mr. Collins' visit to the Bennets and his proposal to Elizabeth. But at the same time one knows that, though from some points of view caricature, in other directions he does, by easy stages, fit into the real world. He is real enough to Mrs. Bennet; and she is real enough to Elizabeth to create a situation of real misery for her when she refuses. Consequently the proposal scene is not only comic fantasy, but it is also, for Elizabeth, a taste of the fantastic nightmare in which economic and social institutions have such power over the values of personal relationships that the comic monster is nearly able to get her.

The implications of her caricatures as criticism of real people in real society is brought out in the way they dovetail into their social setting. The decent, stodgy Charlotte puts up cheerfully with Mr. Collins as a husband; and Elizabeth can never quite become reconciled to the idea that her friend is the wife of her comic monster. And that, of course, is precisely the sort of idea that Jane Austen herself could never grow reconciled to. The people she hated were tolerated, accepted, comfortably ensconced in the only human society she knew; they were, for her, society's embarrassing unconscious comment on itself. A recent writer on Jane Austen, Elizabeth Jenkins, puts forward the polite and more comfortable interpretation in supposing Charlotte's marriage to be explained solely by the impossibility of young women's earning their own living at that period. But Charlotte's complaisance goes deeper than that: it is shown as a considered indifference to personal relationships when they conflict with cruder advantages in the wider social world:

'She had always felt that Charlotte's opinion of matrimony was not exactly like her own, but she could not have supposed it possible that, when called into action, she would have sacrificed every better feeling to worldly advantage.'

We know too, at the biographical level, that Jane Austen herself, in a precisely similar situation to Charlotte's, spent a night of psychological crisis in deciding to revoke her acceptance of an

'advantageous' proposal made the previous evening. And her letters to Fanny Knight show how deep her convictions went at this point.

It is important to notice that Elizabeth makes no break with her friend on account of the marriage. This was the sort of friend — 'a friend disgracing herself and sunk in her esteem' — that went to make up the available social world which one could neither escape materially nor be independent of psychologically. The impossibility of being cut off from objectionable people is suggested more subtly in *Emma*, where Mrs. Elton is the high light of the pervasive neglect of spiritual values in social life. One can hardly doubt that Jane Austen's own dealings with society are reflected in the passage where Mr. Weston makes the error of inviting Mrs. Elton to join the picnic party which he and Emma have planned :

' . . . Emma could not but feel some surprise, and a little displeasure, on hearing from Mr. Weston that he had been proposing to Mrs. Elton, as her brother and sister had failed her, that the two parties should unite, and go together, and that as Mrs. Elton had very readily acceded to it, so it was to be, if she had no objection. Now, as her objection was nothing but her very great dislike of Mrs. Elton, of which Mr. Weston must already be perfectly aware, it was not worth bringing forward : it could not be done without a reproof to him, which would be giving pain to his wife; and she found herself, therefore, obliged to consent to an arrangement which she would have done a great deal to avoid; an arrangement which would, probably, expose her even to the degradation of being said to be of Mrs. Elton's party! Every feeling was offended; and the forbearance of her outward submission left a heavy arrear due of secret severity in her reflections, on the unmanageable good-will of Mr. Weston's temper.

"I am glad you approve of what I have done," said he, very comfortably. "But I thought you would. Such schemes as these are nothing without numbers. One cannot have too large a party. A large party secures its own amusement. And she is a good-natured woman after all. One could not leave her out."

'Emma denied none of it aloud, and agreed to none of it in private.'

This well illustrates Jane Austen's typical dilemma: of being intensely critical of people to whom she also has strong emotional attachments.

## II.

The social group having such ambivalence for her, it is not surprising if her conflict should find some outlets not fully within her conscious control. To draw attention to these, however, is not to suggest that they lessen the value of her conscious intention and its achievements.

The chief instance is the fascination she found in the Cinderella theme, the Cinderella theme with the fairy godmother omitted. For in Jane Austen's treatment the natural order of things manages to reassert the heroine's proper pre-eminence without the intervention of any human or quasi-human helper. In this respect she allies the Cinderella theme to another fairy-tale theme which is often introduced—that of the princess brought up by unworthy parents but never losing the delicate sensibilities which are an inborn part of her. This latter theme appears most explicitly in *Mansfield Park*, the unfinished story of *The Watsons*, and, with some softening, in *Pride and Prejudice*. The contrast between Fanny Price's true nature and her squalid home at Portsmouth is the clearest statement of the idea, but in the first four of the finished novels the heroine's final position is, even in the worldly sense, always above her reasonable social expectations by conventional standards, but corresponding to her natural worth.

To leave it at this, however, would be highly misleading. It is the development which occurs in her treatment of the Cinderella theme that most rewards attention. In *Northanger Abbey*, *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice* it is handled simply; the heroine is in some degree isolated from those around her by being more sensitive or of finer moral insight or sounder judgment, and her marriage to the handsome prince at the end is in the nature of a reward for being different from the rest and a consolation for the distresses entailed by being different. This is true even of

*Northanger Abbey* in spite of the grotesque error of judgment that Catherine Morland is guilty of and has to renounce. For here Jane Austen was interested not so much in the defect in her heroine's judgment as in the absurdly wide currency of the 'gothick' tradition that entrapped her. Catherine throws off her delusion almost as something external to herself. And this is so glaring that Jane Austen seems to have been uncomfortable about it: in describing it she resorts to a rather factitious semi-detachment from her heroine.

'Her mind made up on these several points, and her resolution formed, of always judging and acting in future with the greatest good sense, she had nothing to do but to forgive herself and be happier than ever; and the lenient hand of time did much for her by insensible gradations in the course of another day.'

In *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice* the heroines are still nearer perfection and even the handsome princes have faults to overcome before all is well. Immediately after her final reconciliation with Mr. Darcy, Elizabeth Bennet is tempted to laugh at his over-confident direction of his friend Bingley's love affair, '. . . but she checked herself. She remembered that he had yet to learn to be laughed at, and it was rather too early to begin.'

To put the point in general terms, the heroine of these early novels is herself the criterion of sound judgment and good feeling. She may claim that her values are sanctioned by good breeding and a religious civilisation, but in fact none of the people she meets represents those values so effectively as she does herself. She is never in submissive alliance with the representatives of virtue and good feeling in her social world—there is only a selective alliance with certain aspects of their characters. The social world may have material power over her, enough to make her unhappy, but it hasn't the power that comes from having created or moulded her, and it can claim no credit for her being what she is. In this sense the heroine is independent of those about her and isolated from them. She has only to be herself.

The successful handling of this kind of theme and this heroine brought Jane Austen to the point where a development became psychologically possible. The hint of irrationality underlying the

earlier themes could be brought nearer the light. She could begin to admit that even a heroine must owe a great deal of her character and values to the social world in which she had been moulded, and, that being so, could hardly be quite so solitary in her excellence as the earlier heroines are. The emphasis hitherto had been almost entirely on the difference between the heroine and the people about her. But this was to slight the reality of her bond with the ordinary 'good' people; there was more to be said for the fundamentals of virtue and seemliness than she had been implying. And so, after the appearance of *Pride and Prejudice*, she wrote to Cassandra, 'Now I will try and write of something else, and it shall be a complete change of subject—ordination . . . .' (January 29th, 1813.)

This sets the tone of *Mansfield Park*, the new novel. Here her emphasis is on the deep importance of the conventional virtues, of civilised seemliness, decorum, and sound religious feeling. These become the worthy objects of the heroine's loyalties; and they so nearly comprise the whole range of her values that Fanny Price is the least interesting of all the heroines. For the first time, Jane Austen sets the heroine in submissive alliance with the conventionally virtuous people of the story, Sir Thomas and Edmund. Mistaken though these pillars of society may in some respects be, the heroine's proper place is at their side; their standards are worthy of a sensitive person's support and complete allegiance.

It is a novel in which Jane Austen pays tribute to the virtuous fundamentals of her upbringing, ranging herself with those whom she considers right on the simpler and more obvious moral issues, and withdrawing her attention—relatively at least—from the finer details of living in which they may disturb her. She allies herself with virtues that are easy to appreciate and reasonably often met with. The result, as one would expect, is a distinct tendency to priggishness. And, of course, the book was greatly liked. 'Mr. H[aden] is reading *Mansfield Park* for the first time and prefers it to *P. and P.*' (November 26th, 1815). 'Mr. Cook [himself a clergyman] says "it is the most sensible novel he ever read," and the manner in which I treat the clergy delights them very much.' (June 14th, 1814). Compared with *Mansfield Park*, Jane Austen is afraid that *Emma* will appear 'inferior in good sense.' (December 11th, 1815). It was after reading *Mansfield Park*,

moreover, that the pompously self-satisfied Librarian to the Prince Regent offered her, almost avowedly, his own life story as the basis for a novel about an English clergyman. He must have been one of the first of the admirer-victims who have continued to enjoy her work to this day. And her tactful and respectful reply ('The comic part of the character I might be equal to, but not the good, the enthusiastic, the literary') illustrates admirably her capacity for keeping on good terms with people without too great treachery to herself.

The priggishness of *Mansfield Park* is the inevitable result of the curiously abortive attempt at humility that the novel represents. Although it involves the recognition that heroines are not spontaneously generated but owe much of their personality to the established standards of their society, the perfection of the heroine is still not doubted. And so the effort towards humility becomes in effect the exclamation, 'Why, some of the very good people are nearly as good as I am and really do deserve my loyalty!'

There is no external evidence that Jane Austen was other than highly satisfied with *Mansfield Park*, which is, after all, in many ways interesting and successful. But its *reductio ad absurdum* of the Cinderella theme and the foundling princess theme could hardly have been without effect. This, I think, is already visible in the last chapter, which, with its suggestion of a fairy-tale winding up of the various threads of the story, is ironically perfunctory. For instance:

'I purposely abstain from dates on this occasion, that every one may be at liberty to fix their own, aware that the cure of unconquerable passions, and the transfer of unchanging attachments, must vary much as to time in different people. I only entreat everybody to believe that exactly at the time when it was quite natural that it should be so, and not a week earlier, Edmund did cease to care about Miss Crawford, and became as anxious to marry Fanny as Fanny herself could desire.'

And Sir Thomas's 'high sense of having realised a great acquisition in the promise of Fanny for a daughter, formed just such a contrast with his early opinion on the subject when the poor little girl's coming had first been agitated, as time is for ever pro-

ducing between the plans and decisions of mortals, for their own instruction and their neighbours' entertainment.'

Whether or not Jane Austen realised what she had been doing, at all events the production of *Mansfield Park* enabled her to go on next to the extraordinary achievement of *Emma*, in which a much more complete humility is combined with the earlier unblinking attention to people as they are. The underlying argument has a different trend. She continues to see that the heroine has derived from the people and conditions around her, but she now keeps clearly in mind the objectionable features of those people; and she faces the far bolder conclusion that even a heroine is likely to have assimilated many of the more unpleasant possibilities of the human being in society. And it is not that society has spoilt an originally perfect girl who now has to recover her pristine good sense, as it was with Catherine Morland, but that the heroine has not yet achieved anything like perfection and is actually going to learn a number of serious lessons from some of the people she lives with.

Consider in the first place the treatment here of the two favourite themes of the earlier novels. The Cinderella theme is now relegated to the sub-heroine, Jane Fairfax. Its working out involves the discomfiture of the heroine, who in this respect is put into the position of one of the ugly sisters. Moreover the Cinderella procedure is shown in the light of a social anomaly, rather a nuisance and requiring the excuse of unusual circumstances.

The associated theme of the child brought up in humble circumstances whose inborn nature fits her for better things is frankly parodied and deflated in the story of Harriet Smith, the illegitimate child whom Emma tries to turn into a snob. In the end, with the insignificant girl cheerfully married to a deserving farmer, 'Harriet's parentage became known. She proved to be the daughter of a tradesman, rich enough to afford her the comfortable maintenance which had ever been hers, and decent enough to have always wished for concealment. Such was the blood of gentility which Emma had formerly been so ready to vouch for!'

Thus the structure of the narrative expresses a complete change in Jane Austen's outlook on the heroine in relation to others. And the story no longer progresses towards her vindication or consolation; it consists in her gradual, humbling self-enlightenment. Emma's personality includes some of the tendencies and qualities

that Jane Austen most disliked—self-complacency, for instance, malicious enjoyment in prying into embarrassing private affairs, snobbery, and a weakness for meddling in other people's lives. But now, instead of being attributed in exaggerated form to a character distanced into caricature, they occur in the subtle form given them by someone who in many ways has admirably fine standards.

We cannot say that in *Emma* Jane Austen abandons the Cinderella story. She so deliberately inverts it that we ought to regard *Emma* as a bold variant of the theme and a further exploration of its underlying significance for her. In *Persuasion* she goes back to the Cinderella situation in its most direct and simple form, but develops a vitally important aspect of it that she had previously avoided. This is the significance for Cinderella of her idealised dead mother.

Most children are likely to have some conflict of attitude towards their mother, finding her in some respects an ideal object of love and in others an obstacle to their wishes and a bitter disappointment. For a child such as Jane Austen who actually was in many ways more sensitive and able than her mother, one can understand that this conflict may persist in some form for a very long time. Now one of the obvious appeals of the Cinderella story, as of all stories of wicked step-mothers, is that it resolves the ambivalence of the mother by the simple plan of splitting her in two: the ideal mother is dead and can be adored without risk of disturbance; the living mother is completely detestable and can be hated whole-heartedly without self-reproach.<sup>1</sup>

In her early novels Jane Austen consistently avoided dealing with a mother who could be a genuinely intimate friend of her daughter. Lady Susan, of the unfinished novel, is her daughter's enemy. In *Northanger Abbey* the mother is busy with the household and the younger children. In *Sense and Sensibility* she herself has to be guided and kept in hand by her daughter's sounder judgment. In *Pride and Prejudice* she is Mrs. Bennet. In *Mansfield Park* she is a slattern whom the heroine only visits once in

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<sup>1</sup>This is, needless to say, only a very small part of the unconscious significance which such stories may have for a reader. Most obviously it neglects the relationships of the stepmother and the heroine to the father.



the course of the novel. In *Emma* the mother is dead and Miss Taylor, her substitute, always remains to some extent the promoted governess. This avoidance may seem strange, but it can be understood as the precaution of a mind which, although in the Cinderella situation, is still too sensitive and honest to offer as a complete portrait the half-truth of the idealised dead mother.

But in *Persuasion* she does approach the problem which is latent here. She puts her heroine in the Cinderella setting, and so heightens her need for affection. And then in Lady Russell she provides a godmother, not fairy but human, with whom Anne Elliot can have much the relationship of a daughter with a greatly loved, but humanly possible, mother. Jane Austen then goes on to face the implications of such a relationship—and there runs through the whole story a lament for seven years' loss of happiness owing to Anne's having yielded to her godmother's persuasion.

The novel opens with her being completely convinced of the wrongness of the advice she received, and yet strongly attached to Lady Russell still and unable to blame her. Her attitude is, and throughout the book remains, curiously unresolved. 'She did not blame Lady Russell, she did not blame herself, for having been guided by her; but she felt that were any young person in similar circumstances to apply to her for counsel, they would never receive any of such certain immediate wretchedness, such uncertain future good.' But for all that the rest of the book shows Anne repeatedly resisting fresh advice from her godmother and being completely vindicated in the upshot.

This might mean that Anne was a repetition of the earlier heroines, detached by her good sense and sound principles from the inferior standards of those about her. That would be true of her relations with her father and eldest sister. But she had no such easy detachment from her godmother. Lady Russell was near enough to the ideal mother to secure Anne's affection, to make her long for the comfort of yielding to her judgment. This satisfaction—the secure submission to a parent who seems completely adequate—was denied Anne by her superior judgment. She was strong enough to retain the insight that separated her from Lady Russell—they never mentioned the episode in the years that followed and neither knew what the other felt about it—but she never came to feel her partial detachment from

her as anything but a loss. Nor could she ever regret having yielded to Lady Russell's advice, even though she regretted that the advice had been so mistaken. At the end of the story, reverting to the old dilemma, she tells the lover whom she has now regained :

'I have been thinking over the past, and trying to judge of the right and wrong—I mean with regard to myself; and I must believe that I was right, much as I suffered from it—that I was perfectly right in being guided by the friend whom you will love better than you do now. To me, she was in the place of a parent. Do not mistake me, however. I am not saying that she did not err in her service. It was, perhaps, one of those cases in which advice is good or bad only as the event decides and for myself, I certainly never should, in any circumstances of tolerable similarity, give such advice. But I mean that I was right in submitting to her, and that if I had done otherwise, I should have suffered more in continuing the engagement than I did even in giving it up, because I should have suffered in my conscience.'

It is in *Persuasion* that Jane Austen fingers what is probably the tenderest spot for those who identify themselves with Cinderella : she brings the idealised mother back to life and admits that she is no nearer to perfection than the mothers of acute and sensitive children generally are.

This attempt to suggest a slightly different emphasis in the reading of Jane Austen is not offered as a balanced appraisal of her work. It is deliberately lop-sided, neglecting the many points at which the established view seems adequate. I have tried to underline one or two features of her work that claim the sort of readers who sometimes miss her—those who would turn to her not for relief and escape but as a formidable ally against things and people which were to her, and still are, hateful.

D. W. HARDING.

# 'ATHALIE' AND THE DICTATORS

## I.

THE twelve years' silence that followed the production of *Phèdre* is one of the most curious and intriguing of all literary problems. The critic is confronted with the spectacle of a great poet at the height of his powers deliberately turning his back on the art that had made him famous and refusing not only to write, but also to take any further interest in literature. This decision was the outcome of a personal crisis and since the crisis had a decisive influence on *Athalie* no account of Racine's final period is satisfactory without some discussion of the events which led to it.

*Phèdre* was produced at the beginning of February, 1677, and was a complete failure. The failure was not due to any flaw in that incomparable poem or to mere caprice on the part of the public. It was skilfully engineered by Racine's enemies. It is doubtful whether any other French writer of the same eminence has aroused more antipathy than Racine. He had been the constant victim of professional jealousy and malicious intrigue, but this time matters were carried to unprecedented lengths. As soon as it became known that he was at work on *Phèdre*, the Duchesse de Bouillon commissioned a wretched hack named Pradon to write a play on the same theme, and both works were produced simultaneously. Similar tactics had been employed with *Iphigénie*, but this time nothing was left to chance. The Duchess bought up most of the seats for the first six nights at both theatres, and while Pradon's work was played to a house filled to capacity with her minions, Racine's was played before empty benches.

This prank is said to have cost the Duchess 15,000 *livres*, but its success was complete. Racine was haughty and irritable and bitterly resented any sort of criticism of his work. He had had a good deal to put up with, but in the past he had generally outmatched his enemies. The Prefaces to the tragedies are full of

biting comments on the folly and ignorance of critics. Their miserable, halting epigrams provoked devastating retorts which were sometimes out of all proportion to the offence and in which we detect a savage pleasure in the infliction of pain.

The collapse of *Phèdre* was followed by the usual bitter exchange of epigrams, but the poet's heart does not seem to have been in the battle. This time he capitulated. He turned his back on his enemies, proceeded to compose his differences with Port-Royal and talked of becoming a Carthusian. He allowed himself to be dissuaded from this extreme course by his confessor who counselled marriage. The elegant courtier, who had been the lover of two of the most famous actresses of the day, chose what must seem a strange companion. '*L'amour ni l'intérêt n'eurent part de ce choix,*' wrote Louis Racine of his father's marriage to Catharine de Romanet. His wife was a staid, middle-class lady; she was plain and devout, proved an excellent wife and mother, but had little sensibility for the arts. It is generally believed that she never read her husband's works either from lack of interest or on account of religious scruples. The marriage was celebrated on 1st June, 1677, less than three months after the disaster, and for the next twelve years Racine devoted himself to the duties of a *père de famille*.

These facts have been variously interpreted by writers of widely differing views. Some have attributed the silence to religious scruples, others to disgust with the literary coteries, and others still to the fact that Racine had nothing more to say. It is probable that all these interpretations contain a measure of truth, but no one of them alone can provide an explanation of all the facts. The reasons for the decision must be sought in an unusual *combination* of circumstances. I think that it can be said that the brutality of the attack on *Phèdre* provided the shock that was needed to set in motion certain latent psychological factors which might otherwise have remained inactive.

It must be remembered that at the time of his marriage Racine was in his thirty-eighth year. It is an age at which surprising things can happen. Men who have led disorderly lives sometimes feel the need of stability or of committing themselves *irrevocably* to a particular course of action; and this need often assumes the form of a choice between two extremes leading in

opposite directions. It thus happens that some men—particularly men of letters approaching their fortieth year—who have been indifferent Christians or unbelievers all their lives suddenly undergo a violent conversion, while others make a final break with the Faith. Some who have led irreproachable domestic lives fall a victim to 'the midday demon,' while others who like Racine have been profligates become the model husbands of unattractive women. It is also an age at which men who have led stormy, quarrelsome lives suddenly yearn for peace and quietness and simply give in.

No one to-day doubts the sincerity of Racine's religious convictions, but the grace of conversion does not exclude the human element. The way is often prepared by things which seem at first to have little to do with religion and conversion is nearly always coloured by the milieu of the convert. M. François Mauriac is probably correct in suggesting that in the case of Racine the gesture of submission preceded grace. In his secular plays he had recorded the disintegration of society, had probed the maladies of the individual soul and exposed the brittleness of religious belief, honour and morality in conflict with sexual passion without troubling about a constructive solution of the problems involved. He may well have wondered where this was leading him and it is not surprising that he should have turned in his search for security to the religion of his youth. He was influenced by other considerations as well. He had been brought up in an atmosphere of the most rigid puritanism, but his was an exceptionally sensual nature which had been indulged to the full since the breach with Port-Royal. His critics have commented on his preoccupation with sin and temptation in *Phèdre* and Jules Lemaître went as far as to call it the first stage in his conversion. Now *Phèdre* is not the simple drama of good and evil that Racine contrived to suggest in his Preface. There is an unmistakable element of complicity in that magnificent study of sexual mania, a boldness in the exploration of erotic fantasy which point to a deep-seated conflict in the mind of the poet. Racine had hovered between God and Eros and the weariness of the old *roué* and the ugly circumstances of the death of Mlle. du Parc<sup>1</sup> may well have

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<sup>1</sup>It is said that she died as the result of abortion and that Racine was the father of the child.

played their part in his final choice. It must never be forgotten that he was a man of violent extremes. His Jansenist upbringing had left an indelible impress on his personality and a complete break was impossible. It is only natural that the imperious claims of Port-Royal should have reasserted themselves at a time when his career as a dramatist seemed to be foundering and that his conversion should have taken the form of a return to the strict Jansenism of his youth. There was nothing in Catholic teaching to prevent him from continuing his work as a poet, but there was a great deal in the Jansenist interpretation of that teaching which had openly denounced playwrights as 'poisoners of souls.'

The importance of Racine's life for an understanding of his later work can now be seen. His conversion produced a change of direction; his outlook became positive instead of negative. Although there does not seem at first to be any evidence in his plays to support the view that he had nothing more to say, it is difficult to believe that the new outlook and his growing sense of responsibility for his writings could have been reconciled with the writing of more plays in the manner of *Phèdre*, or that the change could be accomplished without a break in his work. A writer who has passed through a crisis of this sort clearly needs time to settle down again before he can translate his new approach to contemporary problems into poetry. The distance that Racine travelled can only be seen by a close comparison between *Phèdre* and *Athalie*. In spite of Lemaître's comment, *Athalie* is not a development of tendencies that are present in *Phèdre*; it is a new departure in Racine's work. Those critics who have lamented the effects of his conversion and the masterpieces which might otherwise have been written between *Phèdre* and *Esther* were perhaps short-sighted. It is certain that without conversion there would have been no *Athalie*, and no one who has studied the play attentively will feel that the twelve years' silence was a waste of time.

Whether Racine would have turned his conversion to such good account without some sort of outside stimulus may be doubted. Fortunately, the stimulus was provided in a way that could scarcely remain without effect. In 1689 he was invited by Madame de Maintenon to devote his leisure moments to writing 'quelque espèce de poème moral ou historique dont l'amour fût

*entièrement banni.*' It did not matter, she said, whether the poem conformed to the rules, provided that '*il contribuât aux vues qu'elle avait de divertir les demoiselles de Saint-Cyr en les instruisant.*'

Racine carried out his instructions to the letter. I have sometimes felt tempted to describe *Esther* as 'slight,' but the term is inexact. It is not of the same calibre as the great tragedies, but it is clearly the work of a master who was at the height of his powers and who has done exactly what he set out to do. The brutality of the Bible-story is discreetly toned down and the play has a freshness—one might almost call it a fragrance—which is unique in Racine's poetry. It is not a religious play in the same sense as *Athalie*; it does not possess the richness and complexity of that work; but it expresses the awakening of the young girls to the realities of the life about them. The combination of freshness and gravity that one feels in the lines:

Jeunes et tendres fleurs par le sort agitées,  
Sous un ciel étranger comme moi transplantées.

gives the play its special charm. It is the only one of Racine's plays which deserves the misused epithet 'tender.'

*Esther* was performed by the young ladies of Saint-Cyr before the King and his Court with such a success that the invitation was repeated. Racine could never resist success, and the invitation was accepted with alacrity. He put all his powers into *Athalie*, but the result was entirely different. The play was performed on two or three occasions only in Madame de Maintenon's room without music or décors, and when it was printed it attracted no attention. It is said that Madame de Maintenon considered that it was unsuitable for Saint-Cyr and this point of view is certainly understandable; but she may have been prompted by other considerations—by the frontal attack on absolute monarchy in Act III Sc. 5, and by the author's open sympathy with the Jansenist cause. Her reasons are not perhaps of great importance. For Racine success was success and failure was failure. Once more he turned his back on the theatre and this time there was no recall.

## II.

There is a tendency, particularly among French critics, to treat Racine's plays as great poems suspended in a vacuum with-

out any relation to the age in which they were written, as the supreme example of 'impersonal' poetry. This approach implies a view of poetry which is fundamentally unsound. A poem is always in some degree an expression of the personal experience of the poet. In different periods, which for convenience sake are called 'classic' and 'romantic,' the personal element has varied; but the view that personal experience played no part in seventeenth century tragedy is mistaken. A dramatic poet's characters are always symbols—sometimes unconscious symbols—of the poet's personal interests. None of Racine's plays—least of all *Athalie*—is an exception to the rule. We must judge a poet's work to some extent by the breadth and universality of his symbols, or to put it in another way, by the degree of correspondence between his personal sensibility and the sensibility of his age. *Athalie* is the most personal of Racine's works and it is the greatest. It marks a definite extension of his sensibility to fresh regions; it reveals a wider and more mature grasp of experience than any of its predecessors. The religious element played a vital part in this extension of sensibility. For *Athalie* is a religious play in the fullest sense of the term; it is not like *Polyeucte* a great play which happened to have a religious subject.

The theme of *Athalie* is taken from *IV Kings xi*. When her son, Ochozias King of Judah, died, Athalia killed his lawful descendants and made herself Queen. But one of them escaped her. His infant son Joas was rescued by Josaba, the King's sister and wife of the High Priest, and brought up secretly as her own child in the Temple. Athalia, who had become a Baal-worshipper and persecuted the priests of God, was killed by the Levites and Joas crowned King.

Out of these simple materials Racine produced a play which was a searching criticism of the religious and political situation in France towards the close of the seventeenth century. I have drawn attention in another place<sup>2</sup> to one striking difference between the work of Corneille and Racine. In Racine's secular plays there is little trace of the conception of a social order which dominates Corneille's greatest plays and gives them their peculiar strength, for the simple reason that this order was in the process of disappearing, of giving way to an unbridled individualism. Racine

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<sup>2</sup>'The Great and Good Corneille' in *Scrutiny*, December 1938.



saw that the only alternative to chaos was the rebuilding of society on a religious basis ; but even in *Athalie* the difference persists. Racine's conversion did not bring a facile solution to his difficulties; it was no social panacea, it was a source of strength because it brought a fresh realisation of the magnitude and gravity of the problem which confronted him. In his last play he looks wistfully back to the time when a sane order was an established fact; he sees that it has been preserved in a fragmentary state by one section of the community and he considers the means of extending it to the rest of society. But the order remains potential; it is not actually realised in the life of the community *as a whole* as it is in Corneille's work.

With this reservation it can be said that the theme of *Athalie* is a conflict between two orders—between the religious order based on *loi* and a pagan order based on force and bolstered up by ignoble superstition. It is a conflict between the Divine order realizing itself in time and space through human agency, which alone can ensure true freedom, and an unscrupulous lust for power which tries to uproot the religion which stands in the way of its aims. The play is only complete with the destruction of the corrupt order and the restoration of 'law.' For Racine the only guarantee of law lay in the union of Throne and Altar in the person of the Priest-King—in Joas who was a vital link in the succession from King David to Our Lord.

*Athalie* has long been regarded as a *pièce à clef*. When it was published one of Racine's allies, the Père Quesnel, remarked with satisfaction that it contained '*des portraits où l'on n'a pas besoin de dire à qui ils ressemblent.*' Attempts have been made by French critics to discover the 'key,' but this sort of detective work is likely to be unprofitable and misleading. *Athalie* is not, as Sainte-Beuve alleged, 'a simple and powerful story'; still less is it a gallery of contemporary portraits or a 'philosophical play' in which ghostly characters debate abstract problems. The characters are poetic creations, are the vehicles of a poetic criticism of the contemporary situation which is pre-eminently concrete and particular. Racine may well have had Bossuet in mind when he drew his portrait of Joad, but Joad's importance has nothing to do with his resemblance to Bossuet or to the Old Testament model. It lies solely in the fact that he represents a particular element in

the pattern of the play.

One of the most interesting characters is Athalie's general. Abner, whom the High Priests calls *l'un des soutiens de ce tremblant État*, occupies an intermediate position between the warring orders. He tries to combine fidelity to the true religion with loyalty to the person whom he believes, until the last Act, to be his lawful sovereign. It is not unduly fanciful to see him as the representative of Racine's own point of view, to see in his struggle a reflection of the difficulties experienced by Racine in trying to work out the relation of the individual to the social order. It is into his mouth that the great opening speech is placed ;

Oui, je viens dans son temple adorer l'Éternel.  
 Je viens, selon l'usage antique et solennel,  
 Célébrer avec vous la fameuse journée  
 Où sur le mont Sina la loi nous fut donnée.  
 Que les temps sont changés ! Sitôt que de ce jour  
 La trompette sacrée annonçait le retour,  
 Du temple, orné partout de festons magnifiques,  
 Le peuple saint en foule inondait les portiques;  
 Et tous, devant l'autel avec ordre introduits,  
 De leurs champs dans leurs mains portant les nouveaux  
     fruits,  
 Au Dieu de l'univers consacraient ces prémices.  
 Les prêtres ne pouvaient suffire aux sacrifices.  
 L'audace d'une femme, arrêtant ce concours,  
 En des jours ténébreux a changé ces beaux jours.  
 D'adorateurs zélés à peine un petit nombre  
 Ose des premiers temps nous retracer quelque ombre.  
 Le reste pour son Dieu montre un oubli fatal,  
 Ou même, s'empressant aux autels de Baal,  
 Se fait initier à ses honteux mystères,  
 Et blasphème le nom qu'ont invoqué leurs pères.

I have sometimes wondered what makes this opening speech so extraordinarily impressive. I think that it is the certainty with which the great positive values are apprehended, a physical sense of them crowding in upon us. The intense reality of the order that has been lost underlines the tragic contrast of present chaos. The accent falls on four words : *Éternel, solennel, loi, ordre*.

They are not abstract terms; they stand for a clearly defined and deeply felt way of life. 'The chief or rather the only character in *Athalie*,' wrote Sainte-Beuve, 'is God.' The Presence of God is felt mysteriously all through the play shaping the destinies of the players and the *Éternel-solennel* recurs like a theme in music. The solemn ceremonial and the *festons magnifiques* give it a concrete embodiment and the Presence becomes almost tangible. God's 'law' is felt to be supreme and its claims paramount. It is the persuasive effect of 'law' that brings Abner to the Temple on the feast day; its significance is reinforced by the rich traditional associations of *antique* and the reference to the offering of the first fruits stresses its connection with the life of the common people working on the soil. Religion is not an abstract system, but something deeply rooted in the conscience of the community which has a practical influence on their lives. It is the recognition of 'law' that creates 'order.' Order consists in the realization that human life tends towards God. The offering of the first fruits again drives the point home and the homely image of the priests shepherding the faithful into the Temple in an 'orderly fashion' makes us feel that the creation of order is organic, is taking place before our eyes.

When Racine compared the splendour of the past with the distress and division of the present, the crowds who once flocked to the magnificently decorated Temple with the scattered, wavering remnant of the faithful who still remained, he was thinking not only of the disruption of the Church at the Reformation, but also of the persecution of Port-Royal in his own day and this accounts for the intensely personal feeling of the lines. When he wrote *Athalie*, Racine was openly identified with the Jansenist cause; he was a member of a persecuted sect within the Catholic Church, and he must have been aware of a parallel between the *peuple saint* in the play and Jansenist community at Port-Royal. He felt that the task of preserving the true faith and of restoring *loi* belonged to Jansenism. In the play the Temple is the last stronghold of religion in a pagan world, is the place from which the saviour (Joas) will emerge, and for Racine this was precisely the role of Port-Royal. 'Temples' and 'palaces'—using the words in a wide sense—had played a large part in his own life. He had been brought up at Port-Royal, but had abandoned the 'temple'

for the 'palaces' of Louis XIV. When, in his earlier plays, the characters are described as wandering purposelessly in the vast, empty 'palaces'—

Errante et sans dessin, je cours dans ce palais—

he seems to point a contrast between the disorder and confusion of the individual life and an order of society which had ceased to be a real order and degenerated into formalism. When the characters escaped from the 'palace' by 'a secret way,' he was perhaps thinking of his own escape from the restrictions of Port-Royal. There can be little doubt that Abner's return to the Temple symbolises the return of the prodigal but repentant Racine to the bosom of Port-Royal; and the conviction is strengthened by the contrast between the Temple of God and the 'palace' of *Athalie* to which she tries in vain to entice the infant Joas. But Joas avoids making Racine's own mistake!

Although Sainte-Beuve was undoubtedly right in emphasising the Presence of God in *Athalie*, his generalisation is based on an incomplete analysis of the religious elements in the play. They are not simple but complex. There is the hard, 'official' religion—the religion of the orthodox—which is represented by the High Priest, and the uneasy, 'personal' religion which breaks through in the speeches of Abner and still more in the choruses.

The nostalgic note, which is discernible in the opening speech, becomes more pronounced as the play proceeds. In the lines:

O divine, ô charmante loi!  
O justice! ô bonté suprême!  
Que de raisonnis, quelle douceur extrême  
D'engager à Dieu son amour et sa foi!

the hard, precise connotations of *loi*, *justice* and *raison* dissolve into the fragile exotic beauty of *charmante* and *douceur*, and the action of *engager* becomes submerged in a voluptuous mystical ecstasy. In the description of David praising God the process is the same.

Au lieu des cantiques *charmants*  
Où David t'exprimait ses *saints ravissements*,  
Et bénissait son Dieu, son seigneur, et son père,

Sion, *chère* Sion, que dis-tu quand tu vois  
 Louer le dieu de l'impie étrangère,  
 Et blasphèmer le nom qu'ont adoré tes rois?

The warrior king is obscured by the mystic king lost in his *saints ravissements*.

The pronouncements of the High Priest are in a different style. His is a militant religion. He chides Abner and the Jews for their weakness and want of faith and glories in a God of vengeance.

Faut-il, Abner, faut-il vous rappeler le cours  
 Des prodiges fameux accomplis en nos jours?  
 Des tyrans d'Israël les célèbres disgrâces,  
 Et Dieu trouvé fidèle en toutes ses menaces ;  
 L'impie Achab détruit, et de son sang trempé  
 Le champ que par le meurtre il avait usurpé;  
 Près de ce champ fatal Jézable immolée,  
 Sous les pieds des chevaux cette reine foulée,  
 Dans son sang inhumain les chiens désaltérés,  
 Et de son corps hideux les membres déchirés . . .

The High Priest also represents the virile, practical element in religion. He does at one point of the play go into a trance, but his principal work is to bring about the destruction of Athalie by skilful strategy rather than by prayer. The practical element can be seen in the staccato orders which he gives to his assistants:

Qu'à l'instant hors du temple elle soit emmenée;  
 Et que la sainteté n'en soit point profanée . . .

and perhaps in the short and brutal announcement of one of his lieutenants:

Mathan est égorgé.

The skill with which Racine wove these diverse strands into the texture of his play gives it its subtle and varied beauty and also its tragic urgency. It helps us to appreciate the complexity of the problem that confronted the poet. The High Priest and Abner are both concerned in their different ways with the restoration of *loi* in the world. The High Priest stands not only

for officialdom, but also for the institutional element in religion which is the necessary corollary to the mystical element of the choruses—as all reputable theologians would agree. Racine may not have cared for what Joas stood for, but he saw clearly that the goal could only be reached by a combination of practical action and contemplation. It is significant that the High Priest is always regarded as a means to an end. With the crowning of Joas and the death of Athalie his work is done and he becomes at once a figure of less importance. We may suppose that in the new order which was to emerge from the existing state of anarchy he would have been a minor functionary, a sort of ecclesiastical policeman who would keep his eye on the machinery. For the new order was to be centred not merely in the Priest-King, but in the child of tender years whom Racine significantly describes as:

Triste reste de nos rois,  
Chère et dernière fleur d'une tige si belle,  
Hélas! sous le couteau d'une mère cruelle  
Te verrons-nous tomber une secondes fois?

### III.

'Elle a pour sujet Joas reconnu et mis sur le trône'; wrote Racine in the Preface to *Athalie*, 'et j'aurais dû dans les règles l'intituler *Joas*. Mais la plupart du monde n'en ayant entendu parler que sous le nom d'*Athalie*, je n'ai pas jugé à propos de la leur présenter sous un autre titre, puisque d'ailleurs Athalie y joue un personnage si considérable, et que c'est sa mort qui terminera la pièce.'

We may wonder whether Racine altogether believed what he said in his Preface. He was inclined to use the Prefaces to tell the public what it ought to think about the plays. He may have considered it politic to emphasise the religious element in *Athalie* as he had emphasised the moral aspect of *Phèdre* in the Preface to that play. Racine's religion was remarkable for its intense preoccupation with sin; he did not allow his search for a constructive solution of the problem to diminish his passionate interest in evil, in the forces that were undermining the religious order. In

*Athalie*, as in the other plays, one of his principal interests is the disintegration of the personality of his 'heroine.' *Athalie* herself clearly belongs to the tragic sisterhood of the other plays. There is a world of difference between the simple Biblical character who is struck down by the servants of an avenging God and the complex 'modern woman' who is studied with such marvellous psychological insight.

Racine is concerned, as always, with what M. François Mauriac has called *une femme au déclin de l'âge*, with a woman who has reached a crisis in her life. It is not the history of a single event, but the culmination of a series of psychological events. The whole of *Athalie's* past life is evoked in the same way as *Phèdre's*; all her actions have a place in the final pattern and are seen as successive stages leading logically to the final tragedy. The superiority of this over Racine's other works lies perhaps in the greater significance of the issues involved.

*Athalie* is presented as a ruthless, inhuman monster who has usurped the throne of the rightful King and who did not stop at murder in order to attain her aims. She has broken with the historic faith and slaughtered its priests. For like all despots she has found religion the most serious obstacle to the rule of force and superstition the most potent ally. She has carried all before her and at the opening of the play she is faced only with a remnant of the faithful under the leadership of the High Priest who is openly hostile to the usurper. She prepares to 'liquidate' this remnant by the usual methods, but—to the surprise of friends and enemies alike—she hesitates. Her methods of violence have failed to create an *interior* unity and her personality cannot resist the destructive forces that she herself has released. From the beginning of the play she is seen under two different aspects. Josabeth describes her on the day of the attempted murder of Joas :

Un poignard à la main, l'implacable *Athalie*  
Au carnage animait ses barbares soldats.

This image, which has burnt itself into the imagination of the faithful, is suddenly replaced by an alternative. In his opening speech Abner declares :

Enfin depuis deux jours la superbe *Athalie*  
Dans un sombre chagrin paraît ensevelie.

Then her henchman Mathan says of her :

Ami, depuis deux jours je ne la connais plus.  
Ce n'est plus cette reine éclairée, intrépide,  
Elevée au-dessus de son sexe timide,  
Qui d'abord accablait ses ennemis surpris,  
Et d'un instant perdu connaissait tout le prix.  
La peur d'un vain remords trouble cette grande âme :  
Elle flotte, elle hésite ; en un mot, elle est femme.

The hard indomitable qualities implied in *superbe, implacable, intrépide* dissolve into the *noir chagrin*, the *vain remords*: instead of action, there is hesitation and indecision. Athalie completes the evidence. In the midst of her furious outbursts, she is suddenly overcome by a sense of her own loneliness :

Et moi, reine sans coeur, fille sans amitié.

When confronted with the child whom she does not know is Joas she says :

Quel prodige nouveau me trouble et m'embarrasse?  
La douceur de sa voix, son enfance, sa grâce,  
Fait insensiblement à mon inimitié  
Succéder . . . Je serais sensible à la pitié?

It is of the essence of despotism that the ruler builds up a system which is based on the suppression of the natural human virtues, a system which rapidly develops into an unending process of destruction. In *Athalie* the personal tragedy of the despot is seen to lie in the fact that it is the return to the natural human virtues that actually leads to the collapse of the system. The despot is a human being and the remains of his humanity prove to be his undoing.

It is important to realize that *Athalie* is not the study of an isolated individual in the same sense as Racine's other plays. He sets Athalie in her proper milieu and one of the most impressive things in the play is the analysis of the progressive moral deterioration of her entourage and its influence on her policy. The bearing of this point on our present perplexities is obvious and it is worth examining Racine's handling of it in detail. To do so we must compare Mathan's speech in Act III Sc. 3 with the High Priest's attack on absolute monarchy in Act IV Sc. 3.



Ami, peux-tu penser que d'un zèle frivole  
Je me laisse aveugler par une vaine idole,  
Pour un fragile bois que malgré mon secours  
Les vers sur son autel consomment tous les jours?  
Né ministre du Dieu qu'en ce temple on adore,  
Peut-être que Mathan le servirait encore,  
Si l'amour des grandeurs, la soif de commander,  
Avec son joug étroit pouvait s'accommoder.  
Que'est-il besoin, Nabal, qu'à tes yeux je rappelle  
De Joad et de moi la fameuse querelle,  
Quand j'osai contre lui disputer l'encensoir,  
Mes brigues, mes combats, mes pleurs, mon désespoir?  
Vaincu par lui, j'entrai dans une autre carrière,  
Et mon âme à la cour s'attacha toute entière.  
J'approchai par degré de l'oreille des rois,  
Et bientôt en oracle on érigea ma voix.  
J'étudiai leur cœur, je flattai leurs caprices,  
Je leur semai de fleurs le bord des précipices.  
Près de leurs passions rien ne me fut sacré;  
De mesure et de poids je changeais à leur gré.  
Autant que de Joad l'inflexible rudesse  
De leur superbe oreille offensait la mollesse,  
Autant je les charmais par ma dextérité,  
Dérobant à leurs yeux la triste vérité,  
Prêtant à leurs fureurs des couleurs favorables,  
Et prodigue surtout du sang deus misérables.

Mathan is a richly ironical creation. He stands along among Racine's characters and to find anything comparable in French tragedy we have to turn to Félix in *Polyeucte* and Prusias in *Nicomède*. For by using his observation of the political scene Racine created something which was a perfect vehicle for his criticism of the French Court. Mathan is the measure of the corruption of the life of the time; the weaknesses of human nature are set in their true perspective, enabling Racine to lay bare the roots of the evil.

The passage depends for its effect on the contrast between the hard, virile qualities suggested by *joug étroit*, *inflexible*, *rudesse*, and the sinister, subterranean suggestions of *flattais*,

*étudiai, mollesse, dextérité.* The worms 'consuming' the idol indicate the moral softness of the sovereign and look forward to *offensait la mollesse.* Mathan alludes with cynical humour to his own softness when he declares that he was unable to submit to the discipline implied in *joug étroit.* The image of the worms eating the wood of the idol is reinforced by *étudiai leur coeur,* for Mathan's method of insinuating himself into the confidence of the sovereign is identical with that of the worms and by implication the sovereign becomes a *vaine idole*—at any rate in the eyes of the 'enlightened.' The rhyme links *caprices* and *précipices.* For it is the unbridled passion which cannot submit to the *joug étroit* which contains the germ of dissolution. As a final devastating comment, there is the fact that Mathan's defection to Baal was caused by some trivial dispute over the censor.

Loin du trône nourri, de ce fatal honneur,  
 Hélas! vous ignorez le charme empoisonneur.  
 De l'absolu pouvoir vous ignorez l'ivresse,  
 Et des lâches flatteurs la voix enchanteresse.  
 Bientôt ils vous diront que les plus saintes lois,  
 Maîtresses du vil peuple, obéissent aux rois;  
 Qu'un roi n'a d'autre frein que sa volonté même;  
 Qu'il doit immoler tout à sa grandeur suprême,  
 Qu'aux larmes, au travail, le peuple est condamné,  
 Et d'un sceptre de fer veut être gouverné;  
 Que s'il n'est opprimé, tôt ou tard il opprime.  
 Ainsi de piège en piège, et d'abîme en abîme,  
 Corrompant de vos moeurs l'aimable pureté,  
 Ils vous feront enfin haïr la vérité,  
 Vous peindront la vertu sous une affreuse image.  
 Hélas! ils ont des rois égaré le plus sage.

I have already suggested that the theme of *Athalie* is not the study of the destructive forces at work in an otherwise stable order, but a conflict between two separate orders. One of them is wholly corrupt and must be destroyed as a preliminary step towards the restoration of 'law.' The other contains the possibility of a stable order, but stability can only be achieved provided that certain conditions are fulfilled. Joad's admirably democratic

speech is an astonishingly courageous criticism of the Court of Louis XIV; it is a description of the manner in which sovereignty degenerates into dictatorship which is of exceptional interest at the present time; but it only becomes fully intelligible when read in the light of Mathan's pronouncement. It is a statement of the problem from a different angle. Its intention is wholly constructive; it is a serious warning against dangers which may lead to a repetition of the disasters that overtook the *peuple saint* under the rule of Athalie. There is the same contrast between the *plus saintes lois* and the subterranean associations of *charme empoisonneur*, *voix enchanteresse*, *piège* and *abîme*. The effect, however, is to correct Mathan by restoring the values that he deliberately undermined. The *amour des grandeurs* is stigmatised as *ce fatal honneur*; the 'passions' and the 'caprices' are seen to possess a *charme empoisonneur* which inevitably corrodes what is best in civilisation, which leads to an *ivresse* that is incompatible with *pureté* or *vérité*. Mathan's is the *voix enchanteresse*; he is one of the *lâches flatteurs* concealing the dangers, removing the *frein* from the supreme will of the sovereign. This time the situation is looked at objectively and the words are given a different value. The substitution of *frein* for *joug étroit* is an example. In other words, the elaborate subterfuge, the flowers strewn on the edge of the precipice, the *couleurs favorables* which hide truth, are cleared away and the full rottenness of the situation is revealed and judged.

It is interesting to notice that Athalie and her minions (like some of the most notorious of their modern exemplars) are *apostates*. They have abandoned religion and set up a alien system in its place. It is characteristic of these substitute religions, as we know to our cost, that they bear a close resemblance to the thing that they replace. At bottom, Athalie is a woman in whom the habits of mind of a Jansenist have survived the repudiation of the faith and this is true of her entourage. They have a dogmatic system; they have the some uneasy consciences<sup>3</sup>, and they are painfully aware of human weaknesses; but in their system the normal values are turned upside down and it is this that leads to disaster. It is true that there is no 'love interest' in *Athalie*, but Athalie's unbelief is not less corrosive than Roxane's passion for her brother-in-law or Phèdre's for her stepson. Her collapse is

an interior collapse, and though she is actually killed by the Levites, her physical death is simply the consummation of the interior collapse.

## IV.

Athalie's great speech in Act II Sc. 5 is the centre of the play and must be examined in detail. For convenience sake it can be divided into three movements. The first is from 1.6 to 1.26 ; the second from 1.27 to 1.48 ; and the third from 1.50 to 1.88.

Prêtez-moi, l'un et l'autre une oreille attentive.  
 Je ne veux point ici rappeler le passé,  
 Ni vous rendre raison du sang que j'ai versé.  
 Ce que j'ai fait, Abner, j'ai cru le devoir faire.  
 Je ne prends point pour juge un peuple téméraire.  
 Quoi que son insolence ait osé publier,  
 Le ciel même a pris soin de me justifier.  
 Sur d'éclatants succès ma puissance établie  
 A fait jusqu'aux deux mers respecter Athalie.  
 Par moi Jérusalem goûte un calme profond.  
 Le Jourdain ne voit plus l'Arabe vagabond,  
 Ni l'altier Philistin, par d'éternels ravages,  
 Comme au temps de vos rois, désoler ses rivages ;  
 Le Syrien me traite et de reine et de soeur ;  
 Enfin de ma maison le perfide oppresseur,  
 Qui devait jusqu'à moi pousser sa barbarie,  
 Jéhu, le fier Jéhu, tremble en Samarie.  
 De toutes parts pressé par un puissant voisin  
 Que j'ai su soulever contre cet assassin,  
 Il me laisse en ces lieux souveraine maîtresse.  
 Je jouissais en paix du fruit de ma sagesse.

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<sup>3</sup>In the speech from which I have already quoted, Mathan says :

Toutefois, je l'avoue, en ce comble de gloire,  
 Du Dieu que j'ai quitté l'importune mémoire  
 Jette encore en mon âme un reste de terreur ;  
 Et c'est ce qui redouble et nourrit ma fureur.  
 Heureux si, sur son temple achevant ma vengeance.  
 Je puis convaincre enfin sa haine d'impuissance.

Racine was severely criticised in the nineteenth century on the ground that the great monologues were not an expression of spontaneous feeling, but the result of artful contrivance. It was said that they created the impression of being carefully prepared in advance and that this gave the whole of Racine's work a stilted air. This passage, which is a particularly good illustration of the structure of the great *tirades*, is a complete answer to the charge. It is not a bald summary of past events, a frigid account of old emotions; it is part of a carefully thought out method of relating Athalie's past life to the drama of the moment. The emotions not only come to life in the retelling; they are deliberately modified and fall into their place in the pattern of the play. One might almost call the method a critical method because it involved a judgment on the emotions expressed. It has the advantage of bringing the whole of Athalie's life within the scope of the play so that its ultimate meaning is at once perceived. This is what is meant by saying that the tragedy of Athalie is not an isolated event, but the culmination of a series of psychological events.

This speech is Athalie's apologia and is addressed to Mathan and to Abner. It is important to distinguish in the first movement between the speaker's *intention* and the actual *effect* of her oration on her hearers, for the two are distinct. She opens on a note of proud disdain and when she declares :

Je ne veux point ici rappeler le passé,  
Ni vous rendre raison du sang que j'ai versé

she evidently intends to brush aside the past as unimportant; the consonants give the lines an air of brisk determination and the short precise words remind us of a person driving home her point by a series of taps on a table. The next lines appear to be a flat contradiction of this assertion and the contradiction is caused by the pressure of the events forcing themselves into Athalie's mind and refusing to be brushed lightly aside. Line 9 is a concession to Abner and the moral associations of *devoir* are used to excuse Athalie's deeds in his eyes. The reference to *un peuple téméraire* is perhaps an unconscious inversion which reveals Athalie's uneasiness. She cannot admit that she is afraid, but

instead describes the Jews as *téméraire*. The associations of *devoir* are strengthened by

Le ciel même a pris soin de me justifier

which has the appearance of clinching the argument. 'Heaven itself approves my course.'

Athalie is trying to show that her position is at once 'right' and 'secure.' She is trying to convince her hearers in order to convince herself. She dwells at some length on her material successes because they are a sign of divine approbation and also because they give her a sense of security. In the lines:

Sur d'éclatants succès ma puissance établie  
A fait jusqu'aux deux mers respecter Athalie.

the *établie* has a solid reassuring ring which is at once felt to be hollow and insecure. At the same time there is a shifting of the angle of vision. Athalie adopts an impersonal standpoint and looks at herself (inviting her hearers to do the same) from without. We are to stand back and gaze upon the great Queen whose power is firmly established as far as the two seas.

The position is consolidated by the catalogue of 'successes' in which the supernatural and the natural are judiciously mingled. 'It is thanks to me that Jerusalem—the Holy City—enjoys a deep calm,' and the *profond* lends its support to *établie*. The peace extends over the whole country. She does not describe her victories over the Arab and the Philistine; she presents us with a *fait accompli*—

Le Jourdain ne voit plus . . .

Only the careful manipulation of consonants suggests a faint disturbance which preceded the calm and perhaps indicates the mild exertion that was needed to repress the marauders.

There is a further change at l. 19. 'The Syrian treats me as Queen and sister.' Athalie—the 'reine sans coeur, fille sans amitié'—inspires affection as well as respect. For the next six lines the rugged r's and v's give way to the hiss of s's in *pousser*, *oppresser*, *Samarie*, *puissant*, *assassin*, *maîtresse* as Athalie swoops down upon a different and far more formidable enemy. The vague triumphs

over the hordes of Arabs and Philistines are suddenly exchanged for the uncomfortably precise

Jéhu, le fier Jéhu, tremble en Samarie.

The reasons for this are interesting. One has the impression that the victories over the Philistines and the Arabs were victories over fantom armies, but Jehu is a different proposition. Jehu was the person who killed Jezabel and the death of Jezabel haunts Athalie from one end of the play to the other. Jehu was an object of hatred and fear, a physical as well as a psychological danger. Athalie tries desperately to convince herself that she has reduced him to impotence so that he cannot repeat his treatment of her mother in her own case.

Then the final picture of Athalie herself :

Il me laisse en ces lieux souveraine maîtresse.

Je jouissais en paix de fruit de ma sagesse.

The material triumph is consolidated by *souveraine* and *sagesse*, a word with profoundly religious associations.

I have spoken of the difference between the intention and the effect of the passage. When it is studied closely it is seen to be an elaborate pantomime in which Athalie recounts her triumphs over fantom armies. These fantoms have a deep psychological significance because they are an attempt to exteriorise fears which Athalie cannot name. She tries to reassure herself by describing a victory over imaginary enemies in place of her own collapse in the face of true enemies which she cannot overcome. The *effect* if the passage is therefore to create in the spectator's mind an impression of a precarious peace.

Mais un trouble importun, vient depuis quelques jours,

De mes prospérités interrompre le cours.

Un songe (me devrais-je inquiéter d'un songe?)

Entretient dans mon cœur un chagrin qui le ronge.

Je l'évite partout, partout il me poursuit.

C'était pendant l'horreur d'une profonde nuit.

Ma mère Jézabel devant moi s'est montrée,

Comme au jour de sa mort pompeusement parée.

Ses malheurs n'avaient point abattu sa fierté;

Même elle avait encor cet éclat emprunté  
 Dont elle eut soin de peindre et d'orner son visage,  
 Pour réparer des ans l'irréparable outrage.  
*Tremble*, m-a-t-elle dit, *filie digne de moi.*  
*Le cruel Dieu des Juifs l'emporte aussi sur toi.*  
*Je te plains de tomber dans ses mains redoutables,*  
*Ma fille.* En achevant ces mots épouvantables,  
 Son ombre vers mon lit a paru se baisser.  
 Et moi, je lui tendais les mains pour l'embrasser  
 Mais je n'ai plus trouvé qu'un horrible mélange  
 D'os et de chairs meurtris, et traînés la fange,  
 Des lambeaux pleins de sang et des membres affreux,  
 Que des chiens dévorants se disputaient entre eux.

Athalie's peace reveals its insecurity with the opening lines of the second movement. The material success begins at once to crumble. The punctuation gives the impression of a series of strangled gasps. There is a conflict between Athalie's desire to conceal her dream and a desperate desire to confide in some one, to be reassured.

The crux of the passage and perhaps of the play is the word *songe* and Athalie's voice sinks to a terrified whisper:

Un *songe* (me-devrais-je inquiéter d'un *songe*?)

Her fear is powerfully augmented by the word *ronge*. Subterranean influences undermining normal life are one of the principal motifs of the play. The worms 'consume' the wooden idols; the trickery of Mathan undermines sovereignty; and the dream undermines Athalie's peace of mind.

The celebrated line:

C'était pendant l'horreur d'une profonde nuit.

focuses our whole attention on the dream, gathers up the emotion of the previous twenty lines and concentrates it on a single point. It is a wonderful example of Racine's power of condensation. This line robs the material triumphs, sedulously catalogued in the first movement, of all their reality. For the rest of the play it is the dream world which is the reality, the shadow world of the supernatural which breaks through Athalie's psychological



armour and destroys her. The terror and darkness suggested by the long, slow syllables of the *profonde nuit* extend over everything. The *calme profond*, for which Athalie had been fighting desperately, changes into another sort of *calme*—a silence in which terror reigns.

In place of the image of the proud and successful Athalie that was built up in the first movement, there arises a different figure. Jezabel is not merely Jezabel; she is Athalie herself. The description of Jezabel has a profoundly ironic significance—ironic because the subterfuge of Athalie's 'self-portrait' is deliberately stripped away. The *pompeusement parée* refers to the insignia royalty—the external symbols—on which Athalie herself has insisted. The *décor* is seen to be a disguise for her true feelings:

Même elle avait encor cet éclat emprunté  
Dont elle eut soin de peindre et d'orner son visage,  
Pour réparer des ans l'irréparable outrage.

The unreal, painted figure is Athalie in her precarious and unreal security. The *sagesse* of l.26 is not wisdom at all, but trickery. The hopeless despair behind the *irréparable outrage* gives the passage its profoundly tragic note.

The grim story of Jezabel's violent death has always appealed to the imagination of Christians, and it is evoked more than once in this play. Joad dwells on it with a savage glee because he feels that it is the weak spot in Athalie's defences. Athalie herself refers to it because it has never ceased to prey on her mind until it has become a presage of her own death and this explains the reference to Jehu in the first part of the speech.

Racine certainly intended the dream to be accepted as a supernatural warning, but its working is subjective. We must remember that Racine's Catholicism was essentially a religion of intense subjective manifestations, of tormented and uneasy consciences. The figure of Jezabel has much the same significance in this play as Venus in *Phèdre*.<sup>4</sup> Once the fearful warning:

Le cruel Dieu des Juifs l'emporte aussi sur toi

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<sup>4</sup>*Scrutiny*, March, 1938, page 456.

—which looks forward to Athalie's last despairing cry

Dieu des Juifs, tu l'emportes!

—has been uttered, Athalie is a beaten woman. Her character disintegrates in precisely the same way as that of the other Racinian heroines.

The process of disintegration is evoked with consummate power in seven lines. One of the things that make the passage effective is the *speed* of the process of disintegration. The painted Jezabel is presented in six lines; in six lines a sickening feeling of collapse is suggested by the poet. Then there is a pause; the painted figure hangs suspended in the darkness illuminated by a harsh, crude light which reveals everything. The warning is uttered; the *filie digne de moi* links the fate of mother and daughter, and the *digne* heightens the macabre comedy of the scene. Then the figure leans dramatically toward Athalie; Athalie raises her arms to embrace it or to assure herself of its reality or perhaps even to obtain some sort of support from it. Suddenly, the figure crumples up leaving only a mass of torn and bloody flesh over which the dogs fight. It is the outward and visible sign of the interior psychological collapse of Racine's heroine which is presented with a *hardiesse* that is without parallel in the whole of his work. It can now be seen that Racine's great monologues are in no sense a frigid recital of past events. His greatness does not lie least in the fact that the change which takes place in the personality of his characters actually happens before our eyes.

The third movement is no less important than the others; but it does not call for same detailed analysis and is too long to set out in full here. It begins with a continuation of the dream:

Dans ce désordre à mes yeux se présente  
Un jeune enfant couvert d'une robe éclatante . . .  
Mais, lorsque revenant de mon trouble funeste  
J'admira sa douceur, son air noble et modeste,  
J'ai senti tout à coup un homicide acier  
Que le traître en mon sein a plongé tout entier . . .

The word *désordre* is of the utmost importance because of its many implications. The physical disorder to which it refers is the symbol of psychological disorder, but it is also out of this disorder that

the new order will emerge. The child in his white robe is set against the bloody confusion of mangled flesh in order to point the contrast between 'innocence' and 'corruption,' 'order' and 'disorder.' He may also be intended to suggest the Christ-Child because there is evidently a contrast between the disorder of the old world and the order of the new world of Christianity. Nor should we overlook the implication that the new world, for all its gentle beginnings, was a revolution that destroyed what was corrupt in the old. The dagger, for example, is probably a foreboding of Athalie's own death, but it is also symbolical of the stealthy way in which her destruction was brought about and of the secret beginnings of Christianity.

The most important lines in the third movement are those describing Athalie's meeting in the Temple with the High Priest and Joas whom she recognises as the child of the dream:

Le grand prêtre vers moi s'avance avec fureur.  
Pendant qu'il me parlait, ô surprise! ô terreur!  
J'ai vu ce même enfant dont je suis menacée,  
Tel qu'un songe effrayant l'a peint en ma pensée . . .  
Il marchait à côté du grand prêtre.

At this point the two worlds—the dream world and the real world—merge and consolidate against Athalie. The spectacle of the High Priest and Joas making common cause against her suggests better than anything the experience that we get from the last three Acts of the play. We have a sense, which at times becomes almost oppressive, of the hostile forces closing in and paralysing Athalie; but we also have a sense of liberation, a sense of the new order symbolised by Joas taking shape and growing until it transcends the narrow religion of the High Priest.

## V.

Although the play closes with the apparent triumph of religion and the reconstruction of the *tremblant État*, Racine was at some pains in his Preface to remind us that this triumph was only temporary. For many years Joas was a model king, but he ended his reign by killing the High Priest of the time in the Temple

in a fit of anger. This reminder is in perfect keeping with the poet's own attitude. In spite of its satisfactory ending, *Athalie* is shot through and through with an unmistakable note of pessimism. Its nature becomes clear when we compare two brief extracts from Joad's vision of the ultimate downfall of Joas, the Babylonian Captivity and the foundation of the Catholic Church:

Comment en un vil plomb l'or pur s'est-il changé?  
 Quel est dans le lieu saint ce pontife égorgé?  
 Pleure, Jérusalem, pleure, cité perfide.  
 Des prophètes divins malheureuse homicide!  
 De son amour pour toi ton Dieu s'est dépouillé.  
 Ton encens à ses yeux est un encens souillé . . .

\* \* \*

Quelle Jérusalem nouvelle  
 Sort du fond désert brillante de clartés,  
 Et porte sur le front une marque immortelle?  
 Peuples de la terre, chantez.  
 Jérusalem renaît plus charmante et plus belle . . .

There is a striking contrast between the language used to describe the disasters and the language used to describe the foundation of the Church. The images of destruction are precise and concrete; the images of reconstruction vague and abstract. The dull lead smother the glittering gold; the priest is killed in the sanctuary; the incense is 'soiled.' From these ruins there emerges a strange 'repository' Church. The homely 'lead' and the 'soiled' incense emphasize the curious prettiness of the 'brillante de *clartés*' and of the 'plus *charmante* et plus *belle*' which makes the Church seem beautiful at the expense of strength. It is probable that the imagery was suggested by church decorations, but this merely underlines the fact that the poet was obliged to rely on second-hand images to describe the triumph of religion. For the 'new order' is somehow unreal and its very unreality seems to reflect the poet's own disillusionment and the defeat of his hopes.

I think we must conclude that Racine had come to feel that his great hope—the creation of a truly Christian society on the ruins of the society analysed in the secular plays by a synthesis

of all the disparate elements—was not destined to be realized. The history of the past hundred and fifty years has abundantly justified his pessimism. It is true that France rid herself of the evils against which Joad solemnly warned Joas in the attack on absolute monarchy; but the cost to Europe as well as to France herself was appalling. For the remedy was to a large extent destroyed with the evil and the suffering that this involved has not yet finished. Nor can we overlook the immense responsibility of the *Roi Soleil* for the fact that the same evil later took root in a neighbouring country.

Comment en un vil plomb l'or pur s'est-il changé?

At a time when we are fighting to preserve the faith and the civilisation that produced Racine's poetry, it is a question that Christians might meditate in a spirit of humility and repentance.

MARTIN TURNELL.

## SEARCHLIGHT ON TIN PAN ALLEY<sup>1</sup>

' . . . It is only to be hoped that mankind, before it is too late, may turn away from the stupid urge towards quickness, excessive bigness, and possessions, so that great artists may still arise. It is a bad omen for the future that types should exist like R.S. who (even in his art) is a cross between an artist and an industrialist. And yet I almost think that in the new great music machines will be necessary too and will be assigned a share in it.'

Ferruccio Busoni, letter to his wife,  
November, 1908.

WHEN Hector Berlioz, wild mane of hair streaming in the wind and poised sword glittering in the sunlight, conducted, with this glittering sword as bâton, an enormous orchestra, a chorus of about two thousand and a military band of two hundred in his *Symphonie Funèbre et Triomphale*, and then collapsed in tears over the kettle-drums, History, if that ubiquitously shady lady lurked among the multitudes that thronged the Place de la Bastille on that momentous 28th of July in the year 1840, witnessed not only the (temporary) collapse of a great artist but also the end of an epoch in human

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<sup>1</sup>*The George Gershwin Memorial Volume*, edited by Merle Armitage (Longmans, 25/-).

*American Jazz Music*, by Wilder Hobson (Dent 12/6).

*Hot Discography*, by Charles Delaunay, with a foreword by Hughes and Lucien Panaissié and Henri Bernard, translated by Ian Munro Smyth (Le Jazz Hot, Paris).

*Twenty-One Years of Swing Music*, by Lester Hibbs (English Brunswick Record Co.).

*Music as a Profession*, by Howard Taubman (Scribners Sons, New York).

*Music as a Career*, by W. R. Anderson (Oxford, 7/6).

feeling. I do not mean merely that it was the beginning of the end of the glory of the Napoleonic era; but more than this, that it was the last occasion on which great music directly had a hand in the moulding of the evolution of human destiny. Wagner of course, who would have created a New Art and a New World with it, would have liked to think otherwise and in a moment of pique forgot his vivid praise, contemporary with the performance, of Berlioz's strange and stupendous music in making some catty remarks about barrel-organs. In this work, as in the *Grande Messe*, the *Military Te Deum* and possibly *Les Troyens*, Berlioz was indeed a mover and shaker who moved and shook more than kettle-drums and trumpets: but Wagner, although he created a mythology which he would have preferred to call a religion and although the worshippers at his shrine were numerous and faithful, did not help to stir the hearts of men to action as did Berlioz—not to mention the less obvious example of the great composers of the Catholic Church in the days when the connection between music and organized religion was still valid. Wagner's cult was fundamentally an æsthetic, almost a commercial one, a gigantic piece of self-advertisement, and as such the creation of a genius. He did not make history though he was it; Wagner and his monstrous Straussian progeny are the ancestors of the musical movers and shakers of the contemporary scene.

For to-day the composers who take their calling seriously move and shake nothing but themselves and—shall we say?—their initiated clientele. It is true that Albert Roussel, at the request of the 'Président des American bands,' composed in 1932, a piece which he called (in American) *A Glorious Day*, but though I am sure, from all I know of Roussel's music, that it must have been extremely distinguished, urbane and ironic, I'm afraid there can have been in it but little of glory. Our own composers (alas) write marches for coronations which, though they may possibly have moved most unpleasantly the spirit of Sir Edward Elgar, late Master of the King's Music, caused not a flutter in the hearts of the Plain Men (and women) of this Mighty Empire; nor can they honestly be said to have deserved a responsive flutter. Glory is done for and the movers and shakers of to-day are the gods of Tin Pan Alley. I am thinking of the demonstrable effect of music as a social phenomenon, not of its hypothetical effect on men's souls in

which territory music that is great and straight as a dye will no doubt continue to rally if only with the vigour of desperation. The danger is that 'real' music might be overwhelmed by the mere numbers of the enemy, for whether we like it or not we to-day live and breathe 'music' to an extent unparalleled in human history. No doubt our Elizabethan forbear, piping his madrigal part at sight while seated at a round table in the picturesque manner of the New English Singers, or twanging his lute while waiting for the barber to finish with the preceding customer, lived music more fully, but we've got him beaten every time when it comes to breathing it. Inhale and exhale, there's no escaping the 2- or 4-chord General Bass of the ukelele or the outworn cliché of the decadently well-tempered piano.

There are several schools of thought as to what ought to be done about it. Some think that there should be a rapprochement between the 'serious' and the commercial composer somewhat along the lines attempted in the 'twenties by the Parisians, and by Krenek and Kurt Weill; this might be nice if it were at all feasible, but taking for granted the mechanistic bases of our civilisation I doubt if it is. Others think that the split between the serious and the commercial artist should be definite and uncompromising. Taking the premises into consideration and readily admitting that it's sad that whereas once Greensleeves was my delight nowadays gentlemen prefer blondes; and that the conditions that produced the Mozart divertimenti and the comic operas of Rossini were musically more healthy; I myself incline to this view, with the qualification that I believe that everything possible should be done to raise the level of commercial music *for what it is and within its own sphere*. This sounds like a paradox but I hope to prove that it is something more later.

Now we are always being told how fashions change, how the most modish tricks of the music-racket to-day make those of a few years back look as dowdy and ill-fed as a 1920 Paris model. Yet, examining the music on the printed page, the fundamentals of our commercial music seem to have developed scarcely at all, their conservatism is as extreme as that of the exponents of Handelian opera. The melodic material is still the invention of cosmopolitan Jews, with a dash of the negroid for spice and flavouring; and melody-makers (as the phrase charmingly puts it) remain faithful to



the 32-bar tune, whether in 'common' or 'three-quarter' tempo, the bars divided up as follows:

4-bar phrase answered by 4-bar phrase;  
repetition of above;  
two 4-bar or four 2-bar phrases of 'development';  
repetition of first eight bars.

(The relative proportion of 2- and 4-bar phrases depends of course on the speed.) Any innovation creates pandemonium in Tin Pan Alley while Duke Ellington's introduction of a 7-bar phrase gave rise to so deafening a clatter that it might have been as unprecedentedly important as the history books tell us was Monteverde's use of the 'unprepared' dominant seventh. The harmonies remain those of Grieg, Chaminade and of nineteenth century salon music, with an occasional ninth or eleventh from Debussy or Delius to give point—or contour—to some particularly luscious peach of a phrase. The rhythm continues to depend on the apparently inexhaustibly surprising difference between 4, 3 plus 1, 2 plus 2, and 1 plus 3, ironed out to a clod-hopping four in a bar, two 'down' beats, two 'up.' Every now and again someone will think of a new way of blowing into a wind instrument, called a rip or a flair or what-else, or someone will discover a new mute, yet the orchestration of the average commercial as of the hot number (which orchestration came from Paris as much as from Harlem), has been modified but little as the years have passed. Mr. Irving Berlin, uncrowned king of Tin Pan Alley—he who at the beginning of his career could play only by ear in F sharp major and who, so the story goes, when he could afford it, overcame this deficiency by the somewhat oblique method of causing to be manufactured a pianistic contraption whereby, while still ostensibly playing in F. sharp, he could by pressing little pedals modulate to any key he chose—Mr. Irving Berlin has been writing lachrymose or ragtime ditties that wing their way straight to the heart of the man in the street for over thirty years; and his technique is still as it was in the beginning, except that he has polished it up a bit.

But if the music of Tin Pan Alley has not been remarkable for technical innovation and originality of conception it has stepped out, gone places, in other and not specifically musical ways. Consider for instance the work of the legendary heroes of Tin Pan

Alley, figures with the glamour of movie-stars, whose appeal seems to be conditioned by some quality outside their music which is not in itself noticeably distinct from that of the average hack except that it is somewhat more competent. Such a figure was the late George Gershwin, living in the Hollywood luxury-castle of his Manhattan flat, to hear whom play on a piano, with not much more than average efficiency, sometimes pleasant, more often commonplace little tunes harmonized in four or five clichés derived from (say) Massenet which their ears had already swallowed to soporific satiety, thousands of people would sit waiting for twenty-four hours, in winter maybe in freezing cold, in summer in blistering heat. Such a figure is Mr. Cole Porter, maker of naughty but nice, cruel but comic, sophisticated but sentimental lyrics which are a flimsier counterpart of the Hemingway convention and which are, compared with the average, quite witty in their deliberate dippiness, quite touching in the sincerity of their sentimentality—Mr. Cole Porter who for a period of some months made about £1,000 a day out of one song. Such figures are the great improvising virtuosi, like Louis Armstrong, whose epoch-making improvisations turn out, on paper, to be mainly variations of the common chord. Such a figure is Mr. Benny Goodman, clarinetist, and his band, whom even straight musicians were inclined to take rather seriously until the day when, backed by the Budapest Quartet, Mr. Goodman played Mozart, and Mozart lost. Such a figure is, of course, Duke Ellington whose music, as he *Stepped Out*, swept (tornado-like) over two continents, and who was, largely on the evidence of a few mildly commendatory remarks of Mr. Constant Lambert, acclaimed as the First Composer of the Twentieth Century but who has now, I believe, been superseded by a gentleman called Count Basie. I do not wish to be hoity toity about these accomplished entertainers. Both Gershwin and Mr. Porter, though I don't think they had any specifically musical talent, could knock together a tune or a lyric that reflected the least synthetic elements of the ephemera of public taste, and the result was entertaining enough in its way. Messrs. Armstrong and Goodman are very clever instrumentalists so long as they don't wade out of their depth, and the Duke is a natty hand at orchestration. As for Count Basie—well, as an admirer said when I asked him to explain why Basie's band is so good, he's *Got What It Takes*. You see, in themselves the wares

these men peddle aren't worth quarrelling over; it isn't the commerce itself that is dangerous but the fetish that surrounds it. Getting on for twenty years ago George Gershwin strung together a number of pretty tunes which had somehow been mislaid from his latest musical comedy, tied them up in Lisztian pink ribbon and silver paper and played them through with Paul Whiteman's orchestra in an immense stadium before thousands of people and a phalanx of arc-lights. Not long after, M. Koussevitzky was conducting more little tunes strung together not only to the delight of the customary fan-public but to the apparent satisfaction of the international committee of the I.S.C.M., while even Gershwin's musical comedies acquired a peculiar pretentiousness exemplified in a glut of operatic 'counterpoint' that was in effect curiously old-fashioned, Edwardian, Ella Wheeler Wilcox. Of course the swing musicians have always despised Gershwin, yet their position is fundamentally the same—we are even told now that Ellington, who has never revealed any ability to construct beyond the limits of one side of a 10-inch gramophone record, is engaged in the production of an opera. It is very odd to me that the conception of Art with a capital A and a sepia-glossy photograph of the maestro's hands over the keyboard, should seem to have so great a commercial value in America; and it is seeping down to the lowest levels, as well as the least low, of the commercial aspects of public taste, as is revealed in the comic advertisements for 'concert' arrangements (that is, arrangements in 'advanced piano chords, modern harmonies and rhythms' all drawn up according to schedule) of the Classics of Broadway. O it is very funny to read how some such concoction as Alter's *Manhattan Serenade* is a 'world-renowned opus that is achieving immortality,' 'a triumph of melodic splendour, interesting and thrilling,' 'a composition that is destined to survive through the ages because of its artistic perfection,' 'a decidedly unique and daring composition in 5/4, acclaimed by musical authorities as his greatest modern work to date,' 'a definite musical necessity for your library,' and then to consider the pitiful footling incompetence these Modern Musical Classics actually are—for even as a manufactured product they are pathetically incompetent, being stuck together from harmonic snippets out of the Broadway ragbag without the most rudimentary notion as to how to construct even the crudest and most vulgar type of 'tune,' not

to speak of the decidedly unique and the melodically splendid: it is, I say, very deliciously risible to read all this, but it is also a grim portent. The publishers of Lee Sims' *Meditation* ('a highly interesting composition by an acknowledged master') majestically announce that 'melodic and modern, this opus will be a standard for many years to come'; one fears that this time they are only too right.

All this is perhaps well enough known, but can bear repetition. Let us now, however, consider if there is any positive suggestion worth making, let us return to the question of Audience. Now 'serious' music, there's no sense in denying it, has by now become an indulgence. Perhaps it sounds brutal to look at it from the narrowly commercial point of view, but to examine the situation in the music trade is after all the point of these comments. We have grown so used to realizing that serious music isn't a commercial 'proposition'—unless there be the extraneous fan-appeal of a Toscanini conducting—that we forget the urgency of the question that therefore inevitably offers itself, namely: Is all music that isn't on the indulgence side therefore to be consigned to as speedy an oblivion as possible—it won't be very speedy since the rapidly perishing individual specimen propagates itself tenfold—as being the work of the devil? or is there some form of commercial music that might, with qualifications, be worth encouraging? Without insisting on a Marxist interpretation, it really does depend on how much faith you have in the People, the urbanized inhabitants of big cities; whether you think there's no hope of shaking them out of their inert acceptance of the saxophrantic laments of Irving Berlin and the unspeakably dreary inanities of Eric Coates and (say) Mr. Biffo's Brass Quintet, or whether you think there's a minority—an unashamedly tough, urban and (I grant you) probably leftish minority—who would like something more virile if it were offered to them. The enormous success of Marc Blitzstein's operetta *The Cradle Will Rock* makes me think there might be this potential audience, in America at least, though I've an uneasy feeling that the crowded houses and busy box-office may have been due to the unadulterated hokum of the ending, hokum which is quite out of key with the engaging qualities of the music. Of course the piece is the crudest kind of propaganda, and the music *qua* music is no 'unprecedented experience.' But it is

really musicianly, bright, vigorous, lucid, surprisingly clean in sentiment, and in its tenderer moments has a *gentle* cynicism which is peculiarly American and peculiarly twentieth-century, and which is not such a bad substitute as most for the simplest sort of delicacy and decency of feeling. The most important of these qualities, including in itself all the others, is the fact that the score is musicianly; it is music *built* with genuine musical nerve and sinew, honestly accepting a utilitarian convention and free of all harmonic frippery; the work of a man who can do his job well *because* he is a musician, not in spite of being one. It is supremely competent, whereas the feebleness, sloppiness and mawkishness of feeling which characterises the bulk of commercial music to-day is expressed directly in the grovelling inefficiency of the technique. I am thinking mostly of course of the hack of Tin Pan Alley and the ubiquitous and cynically named 'novelty' number; but if Gershwin and Porter and Levant and the best of the swing bands attain a certain efficiency in working the tiny strip of land they've staked their claims on, it is probable that this competence is no more inherently musical than the (necessary) competence of the funambulist. Because Blitzstein's music is music built by a musician and with clearly defined purpose for a clearly defined end, one might, after listening to it, conceivably come to realize the existence of a distinction between the apparently purposeless music that vivifies and intensifies the human consciousness and the apparently purposeless music that stupefies and degrades it; at least this is a claim that can be made with more justice of Blitzstein than of those often-lauded stepping-tones, the Gilbert and Sullivan operas.

I believe, as Blitzstein believes, that if there is to be any improvement in the standards of commercial music it will come *via* the theatre and the cinema, because an artist who has genuine musical talent may here turn his gifts to the working out of strictly utilitarian problems, may know where he stands and what he is about. Blitzstein himself, in the articles he has written here and there during the last few years, has spoken very intelligently and with unerring theatrical instinct of the ways in which the conscientious composer may adapt himself to the exigencies of theatrical convention—of the writing of background music sincerely designed to illuminate and intensify the foreground, of the use of

song-numbers to point ironic effects, of the importance of silence as a dramatic device, of songs employed in the development of plot, where the music is made as it were to condition the drama. He has always insisted that these problems are to be approached from the point of view of the musician's craft, that they require specialized gifts, but that he who has these gifts should be content with nothing less than the most polished workmanship. ('I have heard that a theatre-song, being "plugged," need only be "pluggable," while a concert song can . . . make its points more musically; in other words don't be too good a composer and you may write a successful theatre song. It doesn't make sense to me . . .') I do think it is very largely a bad habit that the sound-track score to the average American—let alone English—film should be as mawkish as the year's *most* mawkish film watered down to an opaque mess of flaccidity and fatuity, that even the toughest and dustiest movies about graft and gangsters, the press and prisons, should be smeared over with the irrelevant trail of second-hand Strauss-Tchaikowsky-Puccini, complete with languorous 'cellos and hysterical fiddles *in excelsis*. It is surely not too ambitious to hope that this job might be handed over to genuine utilitarian musicians such as Blitzstein and to really slick orchestrators such as Russell Bennett. This is not much to ask—it may seem to be very little; but just because it is possible and practical it is worth asking for very often and very loudly, for the more people who are brought to realize even this much, that there is no virtue in incompetence, the better for the future of music and of mankind.

You see it is all very well for the 'serious' composer to maintain, as he usually has done, a proud isolation, but the other side of the problem, in a civilization that is certainly unlikely to become *less* mechanistic, can't be left indefinitely to look after itself. As I have said, I am not in favour of a rapprochement between art-music and commerce because on the one hand the artifying of 'low' music has been demonstrably almost wholly bad and because on the other hand I do not believe that a man who creates music with his heart and his soul and his whole body can ever submit to the conditions of mechanism; the case of the music of the U.S.S.R. is instructive in this connection because, while ostensibly concerned with being bright, simple, 'easy to understand,' it takes over the

conventions of the art-music of the nineteenth century, and, following through neither the implications of the popular and utilitarian nor the implications of the developed art-form, flops feebly between two stools, thus effectively demonstrating the impossibility to-day of compromise<sup>1</sup>. The honest composer can create music that is a full artistic expression, or he can construct music that is sincerely adapted to the conventions of industry; but he can no longer do both at the same time. Since the majority of us are seemingly obliged to live mechanised lives, it is the more important that we should create our urban (not urbane) music for entertainment as toughly and urbanly as possible, as free from extraneous gloss and irrelevant sloshiness of feeling. In trying to do so the composer who has his wits about him will maintain an intimate contact with the theatre, where he can unequivocally 'supply' a 'demand,' and where, as Blitzstein himself has said, 'music is a powerful, an almost immorally potent weapon.'<sup>2</sup> For although we

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<sup>1</sup>In the music of the Soviet, art and commerce find their lowest common denominator in a drably uniform academicism. There is little to choose between Miaskovsky's dreary triptychs of post-Glazounov symphonies; the inverted academicism of Shostakovich's undigested hybrid of Tchaikowsky and Poulenc, with occasional self-conscious excursions into the machine-music of the Age of Steel; and the deliberate utilitarianism of Prokoviev's extravagantly praised *Peter the Wolf* music which, with the possible exception of Peter's own tune—and this relapses into irritating and eventually ineffective repetition—is scarcely superior to the score of the average Disney cartoon. Both in Prokoviev and in Disney the tunes and harmonies are too sentimental, the orchestration too lush, to be apposite and logical from the musical and/or utilitarian standpoint; what is needed is something analogous to the short melodic phrases in symmetrical patterns, the rhythmical ostinatos, the clear-cut polyphonic orchestration employed in his film music by Erik Satie. I have discussed this in my article on Jean Wiéner which appeared in *Scrutiny* for December, 1937.

<sup>2</sup>'You can say in a song what would ordinarily take pages of dialogue, and you can expand and deepen, too, by means of music . . . Music will do things you would never dream of; it can be fantastically perfect for one scene; it can louse up another

have long ceased to hope for an idealistic or 'soul-satisfying' relation between music and the community—which is much the same as saying between music and the stage—perhaps music may yet make a comfortable wife, a faithful washer of dishes, a good cook, an efficient manageress; this much is certain, for too long now she has been an 'immorally potent' whore.

It might be objected that you can't write interesting music for the theatre until there is a live theatre to write for; and that if there were a live theatre we would be back at the social situation in which music for entertainment would be also satisfying in itself—as is that of Chabrier and the best of Offenbach—as a form of minor art. But I think this objection is specious since I am using the word 'theatre' as a generic term to describe all the types of contemporary entertainment, particularly the film and the radio show, in which more or less mechanized music is involved, and it can hardly be denied that here are new problems which demand fresh methods of treatment; for it is not *necessary*, even today, for theatre-music to incapacitate people from genuine response to the music of art and the concert-hall. I know there is *at present* no theatre-industry in this country comparable with the American film industry or the music-racket of the bouncy boys of Broadway—no theatre, that is, in which the Blitzsteins and Russell Bennetts could feel at home—but this is not, I believe, a consideration of much importance. Music was a cosmopolitan hussy in the days when she lost her reputation in (as most people think) America's Tin Pan Alley; if ever she recovers her respectability there it will—what with cinema, radio, television and the other paraphernalia of progress—be only a matter of time before this comparative

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scene to an extent which is unbelievable. There is only one rule I know; follow your theatre instinct. You discover you've got it in very much the same way as you first discovered you were a composer. You may be wrong on both counts; but your inner conviction is all you've got.' This is well said; and I would add that in Blitzstein's case the 'theatrical' or utilitarian talent seems to be inseparable from the 'æsthetic,' for such art-music of his as I've come across, is quite uninteresting. And when Russell Bennett forsakes commerce for Higher Things it is difficult to repel all recollection of the monstrosities of Symphonic Jazz.



respectability is also cosmopolitanly asserted, with a fanfare (let us hope) of not too tinny trumpets.

The reform I am advocating—that commercial music should be entrusted to real musicians of specialized training, who would execute the job in hand with the greatest possible clarity and cleanliness—is mainly a negative one; and that we cannot hope for much more than a negative virtue is, I believe, implicit in the case about the relation between art and industry which I have been trying to put forward in these pages. But I think it is just worth while asking this further question—whether, assuming these conditions obtained, the ‘urban spirit’ might not in time, through and by means of this honest simplicity of musicianship, evolve for itself a form of popular music which might be, *strictly within* the conventions of commerce, of sufficient musical interest to be accepted as a form of minor popular art—because I think there is just one example already available which might be said anticipatorily to approximate to these conditions. I am referring to the recordings which, some years ago, Spike Hughes made with a negro orchestra of his own *Pastoral*, *Donegal Cradle Song*, and *Air in D flat*, really charming and personal tunes piquantly harmonised, pieces whose merits do not depend on their being, in the manner of Blitzstein’s music, designed for and conditioned by the theatre or radio show but which *make use of* the swing convention in much the same way as (for instance) Grieg used the convention of the Victorian drawing-room piece, and with a comparable value. Unfortunately, the case of the Spike Hughes recordings cannot be said, on examination, to prove very much; for although these pieces are admired by professional swingsters, they are not admired because the tunes are elegant and the harmonies comparatively expressive rather than manufactured but again for the unenlightening reason that they’ve Got What It Takes—one enthusiast, when I suggested that musically speaking these pieces were in a *different* category from Count Basie or even the best of Ellington, was just unable to see what I meant. In other words, these compositions are not really an exception to my contention that it is difficult and maybe impossible to reconcile the music of art with that of commerce, or at most they are only the exception that proves the rule, because their commercial appeal depends entirely on their virtuoso or funambulist qualities and is

independent of their musical ones. The minor artist in Hughes is almost as 'isolated' as the far from minor artist in (say) Albert Roussel; commercially the records are admirable, like the work of Blitzstein, not because they are artistic but because they are competent. And perhaps here is a lesson, in that it seems probable that it would have been better for Hughes if he had been content with competence, for in squashing the artist in him that was lonely in the world of commerce he seems to have squashed his competence too. He now inhabits the most disreputable haunts of Tin Pan Alley and is neither a composer nor a craftsman. There may be no place for the commerce that might be minor art as opposed to the commerce that pretends to be major art; but if this is so and continues to be so it is the more necessary to keep the materials spick and span, to look to the cleanliness of the tools.

The greatest obstacle to reform is the fact that commercial music is seldom listened to but merely creeps (insidious worm) unawares into the soul. Perhaps the only admirable feature of the swing-music ramp is that it does expect its devotees to listen to its effusions and that it does enforce rigorous standards of criticism, even though these standards are misguided ones. For the rest, no-one will bother to criticize what everyone accepts but hardly notices, and in this respect the music-trade is worse off than the film industry since even film-critics tell film-fans that some movies are, by their standards, better than others. If anything is to be done it is therefore obvious that the musicians themselves must take the initiative, and there are signs, in America, with the formation of various guilds and unions, that the musicians will not finally resign their profession to the incompetence of Big Business without a fight.<sup>3</sup> This is all to the good; but whether or no trained

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<sup>3</sup>I have spoken of Blitzstein and Russell Bennett because they are most representative but it would be false to suggest that they are the only American composers interested in the problem. Apart from such amiable figures as Virgil Thomson I am inclined to think that the real talent of one of America's most boosted 'serious' composers has, or should have, a distinctly commercial bias. Those who were present at the I.S.C.M. concert in London in 1938, at which Aaron Copland's *El Salon Mexico* was performed, will remember that the audience reacted to it in a manner reminiscent of the reaction of a

musicians gain a footing in Tin Pan Alley and are able by indirect means to clean up a little some of the lower aspects of public taste, let us not be too hard on Tin Pan Alley's original unmusicianly denizens. They were symptom rather than cause, the weakly offspring of the real perverters of taste who flourished in circles superficially less degenerate, for although music lost her *good name* in Tin Pan Alley she had lost her virtue long before in the days when the Charpentiers, the Mascagnis, the Wolf-Ferraris, purveying the harmonic 'thrill' in the cult of the verismo, cashed in on Richard Strauss, who had cashed in on Wagner. I would be prepared to maintain that it was with these that music touched the most abysmal depths of her dishonour, for the business-men of Tin Pan Alley are for the most part simple-minded creatures whereas the Charpentiers added to emotional and intellectual rottenness the deeper immorality of being double-faced. I am reminded of a letter which Claude Debussy wrote to a friend *a propos* of *Louise*—I quote Mr. Edward Lockspeiser's translation:—

' . . . I have been to the show of the Charpentier family, so that I am in just the right mind to appreciate the forcefulness of your letter. It seems to me that this work had to be. It supplies only too well the need for that cheap beauty and idiotic art that has such an appeal. You see what this Charpentier has done. He has taken the cries of Paris which are so delight-

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university audience at a highbrow film-show to the appearance of Mickey Mouse. Of course the critics properly stigmatized both the music's blatant vulgarity and the audience's tell-tale responsiveness; but I couldn't help thinking that although *El Salon* might be beneath contempt as a self-subsistent work of art representative of the most 'advanced trends' of contemporary composition, yet nonetheless if it had appeared *in a suitable context* in a Broadway show or in one of the smarter Hollywood 'musicals' it would have been immeasurably more efficient and effective than any of the comparable productions of Gershwin, and not unhealthily entertaining; whereas it is difficult to believe that most of the music performed at these annual contortionist manifestations of clique-puffery could be healthy or entertaining or effective in any way or in any context whatsoever.

fully human and picturesque and, like a rotten Prix de Rome, he has turned them into sickly cantilenas with harmonies underneath that, to be polite, we will call parasitic. The sly dog! It's a thousand times more conventional than *Les Huguenots*, of which the technique, although it may not appear so, is the same. And they call this Life! Good God, I'd sooner die straight away. What you have here is something of the feeling after the twentieth half-pint, and the sloppiness of the chap who comes back at four in the morning, falling all over the baker and rag-and-bone man. And this man imagines that he can express the soul of the poor!!! It's so silly that it's pitiful . . . But then people don't very much like things that are beautiful—they are so far from their nasty little minds. With many more works like *Louise* any attempt to drag them out of the mud will completely fail.'

This painfully prophetic document was written on February 5th, 1900, and we know now that *Louise* did indeed 'have to be' and we may well wonder whether the 'reform' we speak of may not be a futile will-o'-the-wisp. Yet I think there is this much to be said by way of consolation, that Debussy probably exaggerates when he suggests that 'people' are congenitally nasty-minded. I believe they are rather congenitally lazy and apathetic, and this, though it is a very difficult problem to tackle, is not by its very nature insuperable. At least Blitzstein and his colleagues work today with their eyes wide open, realizing the difficulty and the urgency of their task, whereas at the turn of the century Richard Strauss, Heir to Wagner and Europe's Greatest Composer, sincerely expressed the conviction that *Louise* was a step forward in the history of music and of opera. The genius is not yet extinct, as is testified by the prodigious success, no doubt partly conditioned by circuitous associations with revelry in the dance-palace and democratic behaviour on the part of the Royal Family, of the stuffily inept productions of Jaromir Weinberger: and I myself, writing forty years after the statement of Claude Debussy's letter, would be inclined to say that to listen to *Louise* is musically and morally more degrading than to listen to all the operettas of Mr. George Gershwin, and even the better part of Irving Berlin, for it is better to assent to the all-mightiness of chrematistics than

deliberately to exploit the lowest under cloak of the nobly enlightened idea. Honesty is essential if there is to be a future for the 'public' on the one hand, the 'artist' on the other; and I cannot do better than conclude with another quotation from the letters of Ferruccio Busoni, a very great artist who suffered more acutely even than most from the necessity to adapt himself, as a performer, to a 'second-best use':—

'It is a great error to suppose that because I am a good (and also effective) artist, I should—or could—be brought into contact with the Public (in general). Artists have as much to do with the public as religion with the church. I mean, religion *belongs* to something inside, something personal (like talent) . . . In the middle of writing sentences like these, I received a telegram from Hanson: "Congratulations on the great success in Los Angeles, means very much for the future." My God! Am I then some-one who seeks a future in California? But perhaps he means California's future. (I wish it every possible prosperity)'.

W. H. MELLERS.

## REVALUATIONS (XII):

## THE POETRY OF COLERIDGE

OF the bulky volume of poetry which Coleridge has left behind there are only several poems which are of sufficient merit to attract our attention still ; but there is little poetry which one approaches critically with more hesitation than these. There is an understandable temptation to accept them at their popular value without making an effort to pass judgment on that evaluation. It is a matter neither for wonder nor censure that this should be so. The intimate familiarity that may be taken to exist between the ordinary reader of poetry and *The Ancient Mariner* or *Kubla Khan* is an added difficulty towards a critical consideration that would not, in any case, be easy. In *The Ancient Mariner* this difficulty exists in a suggestion of moral purpose—a suggestion so elusive that it is of no value, yet sufficiently present to implore our assent to pretensions that a more detailed examination must reject. There is, in short, an ambiguity of motive, of creative purpose in the poem which, even unconsciously, induces uncertainty in the mind of the reader and leads him to attribute unmerited magnitude to the poem. It is doubtful if Coleridge himself was aware, when he composed *The Ancient Mariner*, of movements sprung from any loftier creative impulse than that to which he later referred in the *Biographia Literaria*. Speaking of those poems dealing with the supernatural which he undertook for the *Lyrical Ballads* he there wrote, ‘ . . . the excellence aimed at was to consist in the interesting of the affections by the dramatic truth of such emotions as would naturally accompany such situations, supposing them to be real.’ Such a motive, in the last analysis, was not substantially different from Mrs. Radcliffe’s or Monk Lewis’s.

One need not cavil at applying the term moralist to Coleridge. He was concerned with philosophy and religion and politics in a way that the merely frivolous can never be concerned with them, and particularly in establishing a vital relationship between them and the world. It would be remarkable if behind the explicit motive

of *The Ancient Mariner* it were not possible to catch glimpses of an ulterior and possibly more real impulse at work. Coleridge's poetry may be rated on too high a level, but to assume that he approached it as a pedestrian task not essentially different from ledger work would be to do him an injustice. For good or ill Coleridge could not help drawing in some measure from his full sensibility. The raconteur of supernatural tales is, in *The Ancient Mariner*, not quite free from the moralist. The moral element is forgotten, if indeed it was ever recognized as present ; it is changed, choked out by theatrical fripperies. All else is put aside in the fuller attention that is given to the merely dramatic motive. But although the moral motive is scotched, ineffectual fragments are still to be seen in odd corners of the poem as indications of that ambiguity that in the beginning was not absent from Coleridge's mind, and which still tends to make one slightly puzzled in reading *The Ancient Mariner*.

I have suggested that this ambiguity is, then, a dispute between the dramatic and the moral motives in composition, and that from the beginning Coleridge exerted his full force on behalf of the first ; that he succeeded in what he wished, but was only not sufficiently neat in disposing of the remains of the latter. The ineffective moral motive of *The Ancient Mariner* is a Christian one. It stresses the necessity of supernatural love as the order in creation. It is degraded and like an appendage when at last it comes to a head in the last stanza but two of the poem :

He prayeth best, who loveth best  
All things both great and small ;  
For the dear God who loveth us,  
He made and loveth all.

But disguised and unsatisfactory as its expression is, it is still the central idea of the whole poem, the core around which the action is developed, and without which the sequence of events would be meaningless. In tracing the play of this stunted moral motive, so much thrust into the background, against the length of the poem, a certain roughness of handling is necessitated. But if the interpretation seems arbitrary it is not meant to mark the boundaries of the motive with any precision, but only to point to its existence in the poem.

The transgression of the Ancient Mariner in killing the Albatross is a violation of that supernatural charity which should rule throughout creation. The sanctions which are imposed for the death of the Albatross do not seem remarkable when one reflects that the extraordinariness of the bird does not exist in its own right. It is necessary to bear in mind the stanza :

At length did cross an Albatross,  
Thorough the fog it came ;  
As if it had been a Christian soul,  
We hailed it in God's name.

In these lines the Albatross becomes, in effect, a person. It is given a kind of inviolability. It has been deliberately placed by the Ancient Mariner on the same plane of creation which he himself occupies, and the full play of the will to which this deliberation gives scope brings to the Ancient Mariner's act of violence a special guilt.

The punishment which the Ancient Mariner undergoes begins to abate when he is able to generate stirrings of love in the soul once again for created things. One can place this moral motive of the poem locally very well in the last two stanzas of Part IV. Speaking of the water snakes the Ancient Mariner says :

O happy living things! no tongue  
Their beauty might declare :  
A spring of love gushed from my heart  
And I blessed them unaware :  
Sure my kind Saint took pity on me  
And I blessed them unaware.

The self-same moment I could pray ;  
And from my neck so free  
The Albatross fell off, and sank  
Like lead into the sea.

The moral motive is almost explicit at this point. It is at the beginning of Part V that this moral becomes operative in the positive sense. Up to this point the Ancient Mariner has been the active agent, but his will has not worked in harmony with the divine goodness which now, through the operation of a supernatural



mechanism, begins the work of regeneration in his soul. There follows quickly that passage in which the seraph band enters the bodies of the crew. It is one of the most dramatic passages in the poem. Bearing with it reminiscences of the Incarnation and the Resurrection, it is but a further insistence on the controlling principle of love which springs from God.

This interpretation, though it is obvious enough, is not the one most immediate and apparent. Indeed, it lies far back in the poem. We are likely to overlook it entirely, despite the kind of obviousness which it can claim, and it would make little difference but for the moral overtone which it strikes, and which reaches our ears like a faint echo suggesting a more considerable substance than search is likely to verify. The reader more probably assumes, for example, that the Albatross is a bird of sinister significance whose death liberates inexplicable threads of mystery to wave in the atmosphere. The sequence of action is, as a result, microscoped to a moral inconsequentiality from this point onwards. It was what Coleridge wanted. He even assists the reader to this interpretation by his marginal note referring to the bird of good omen. As the poem stands it is indeed the interpretation that should be made ; but the moral motive which was sketched in above, ignored and distorted, hovers in the background and implies a moral integrity which does not exist.

The dramatic purpose of the poem is realized by means of the supernatural mechanism. But as this mechanism is a means to the dramatic fulfilment of the poem, it works also towards the failure of the moral motive. Still, the function which the machinery performs it performs well, and it is one which necessitated a mechanism of this order. The peculiar quality of the supernatural machinery consists in its being localized ; one might almost say, *essentially* localized. If the supernatural is to be treated at all it is inevitable that it should be given extension, and to do this is to tie it down to a particular place. Yet it is not impossible that these necessary materializations should appeal to the reader only as inevitable symbols of states of being that cannot otherwise be expressed. Dante achieved this. But Coleridge places his supernatural beings against the geography of an unknown world in such a manner that their respective mysteries enforce each other. This means that while the mystery of the world is increased, that of

the supernatural not only decreases but changes in character. There is little that more readily appeals to the imagination than the mysteries of unexplored realms. To-day when the mystery has been largely swept off the earth those who still feel the appetite have to be satisfied with the somewhat prepared mystery of Sir James Jeans and the scientific popularizers of the last unexplored frontiers. But it isn't quite the same. The achievement of Coleridge is that he succeeds in recreating an atmosphere of mystery that a long line of explorers from Vasco da Gama to Byrd have been at some effort to take from us.

This air of mystery is created by direct statement and by playing the supernatural against a terrestrial background. It is stated directly, for example, in lines such as,

We were the first that ever burst  
Into that silent sea.

Coleridge's process of building up this air of mystery, inasmuch as it concerns itself with descriptions of 'ice as green as emerald,' the relative position of the sun, the rather weird effect of personifying and capitalizing 'the STORM-BLAST,' the suitably dramatic choice of the South Pole and then the Line as the course of the ship's voyage, and particularly the skeleton ship with its crew, Death and Life-in-Death, is sometimes theatrical, but it is innocent always. It is indeed this innocence that keeps the whole machinery at times from creaking. By innocence here I mean that accomplished lack of sophistication which is sometimes so characteristic of Coleridge. By felicitous touches Coleridge tapped forgotten emotional connotations. He is able to suggest fabulous mediæval sea monsters with some subtlety:

Yea, slimy things did crawl with legs  
Upon the slimy sea.

But this direct statement of the geographical mystery is intensified by the familiar movements of the dæmons of the middle air through their element, by the skeleton ship which, with its plunging and tacking and veering gives the impression of being a constant inhabitant of the Pacific, by the Polar Spirit—in short, by that sense of supernatural population which seems to be a part of the background against which it moves. The atmosphere of *The Ancient*

*Mariner* is heavily charged. The earth is a mysterious place, but its mystery is not, strictly speaking, the mystery of rocks and stones and trees. It is in good part the mystery of the spiritual beings who reside in them and whose identities are, for the poem's purposes, not clearly distinct.

To have succeeded in recreating this air of mystery, or more correctly, in creating this new air of mystery, is not after all a major achievement. It is comparatively trivial. Yet if we search for a more substantial value in *The Ancient Mariner* the search will not be fruitful. The moral value of the poem is sacrificed to the attainment of a somewhat frivolous distinction. The texture of the poetry itself is never inadequate to its purpose, but it is not, for the most part, interesting. It is inflexible because it is manufactured to compass a certain preconceived effect, and one that, from Coleridge's own words which were quoted above, is scarcely closed to suspicion. It is not likely that words of such impersonal calculation should have led on to poetic attempts whose roots were buried deep in the essential impulses of the man. The chief objection must be, I think, that *The Ancient Mariner* brings into play a machinery that is by its nature moral, but caricatures and deflects that machinery from its true purpose, that a smaller satisfaction may be realized. It is trivial, but it is not honestly so. Its pretentiousness is of a type that for a small effect debases a universe, and this is a charge of some gravity. It has lost its moral bearing and stands at the summit of a declivity at whose foot is *The Blessed Damozel*.

*Kubla Khan* is a poem of less worth than *The Ancient Mariner*, but the praise which it has received has been comparatively more excessive. There is in addition to the exaggeratedly laudatory attention which *Kubla Khan* has received a tendency, on the other hand, to consider it as a kind of psychological backwash from *The Ancient Mariner*. Whatever truth might possibly be in this attitude, the poem certainly has a quality peculiarly its own. Nevertheless Coleridge's judgment on it, that it was primarily a psychological curiosity, is not without its justness. Although it is only a fragment it is difficult to imagine that its completion would have brought to that portion which has been given us any new character or quality in which it may now seem to be lacking, and there is, in fact, some reason to rejoice for its not having been completed.

It is easy to believe the correctness of Coleridge's account

of its inception. The imagery, if indeed some such term as *visuality* is not more appropriate, is of the fluid, indistinct type that naturally evokes a landscape seen in a dream. According to Coleridge the lines in *Purchas's Pilgrimage* on which his eyes were resting when he fell into his sleep, and which may be considered as the seed from which the poem as a whole sprang, were these: 'Here the Khan Kubla commanded a palace to be built, and a stately garden thereunto. And thus ten miles of fertile ground were enclosed with a wall.' The first verse of the poem, which comprises the first eleven lines, contains Coleridge's poetic creation of these two sentences, and beyond a natural enlargement nothing else. As poetry the first verse is much the best of the three. The rhythm is more searching, the lines more sensitive to the experience which they express. There is a vividness which begins to fade as the picture is expanded in the thirty-five lines of the second verse. Matter that seems foreign to the original inspiration is brought in. Thus we get a rather stock Coleridgean image in these lines:

A savage place! as holy and enchanted  
As e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted  
By woman wailing for her demon lover!

The natural Coleridge, the one of *Christabel*, has not been quite able to subdue some rather worn feelings of his to the particular impulse of the new poem. Shortly after these lines follows this one:

As if the earth in fast thick pants were breathing.

Yes; one now feels justified in assuming that the white intensity of inspiration under which Coleridge is supposed to have written *Kubla Khan* before the person from Porlock turned up is beginning to wane at line eighteen. Most of the remaining lines of this verse are echoes of the first eleven. The third verse, except for several lines, has no real connection with the first two verses at all, and it is easily the worst of the three. The alliteration of the first line of the verse,

A damsel with a dulcimer,

is almost vulgar with its blatant, unmeaning emphasis, and the verse fails to achieve any greater distinction than what one would expect from the tone which has been set by that line.

One may examine this decline in poetic intensity in *Kubla Khan* by directing one's attention in particular to the rhythms in the three verses. In the first it is adequate to the vision it is trying to convey. In the second verse, as Coleridge becomes more expansive and verbose, the rhythm carries on in a fatigued, halting fashion, insensitive to variations of feeling and tone. In the third verse the rhythm is metallic and sing-song. From this one is led to lament with decreased regret the intrusion of that much-maligned person from Porlock. It is possible that he really did Coleridge some service; because while the charm of the first verse of *Kubla Khan* is sufficient to dull one's senses to the fact that the two following verses are singularly devoid of anything like a comparable quality, it is doubtful if those first eleven lines could have extended their empire over poetic wastes of much vaster extent. If one is inclined, he may join in the general chorus of lament that Coleridge's masterpiece was not finished. The impulse may be generous, but it is unwise to tempt charity.

In speaking of the first verse of *Kubla Khan* I have suggested that the word image is perhaps too concrete to describe accurately the pictorial effect of these lines, and that some less definitive word such as *visuality* would be preferable. But it is necessary to look at the lines themselves :

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan  
A stately pleasure-dome decree :  
Where Alph, the sacred river, ran  
Through caverns measureless to man  
Down to a sunless sea.  
So twice five miles of fertile ground  
With walls and towers were girdled round :  
And there were gardens bright with sinuous rills,  
Where blossomed many an incense-bearing tree;  
And here were forests ancient as the hills,  
Enfolding sunny spots of greenery.

If one, being ignorant of the poem, yet with some familiarity of literature, were to read the lines for the first time he might possibly place it correctly. But there is a faint Miltonic cadence, and it would be understandable were he to place it earlier. Certainly, there is no stereotyped Romanticism about these lines. There are none of the

stock expressions one might fear, and, in fact, it is even difficult to point to places where the imagery comes to a concentrated head. The distinctive quality of the verse is that it is without key-words. There is rather a thin, shining wash of imagery, and the nouns and adjectives are rich but indefinite in meaning. It is a verse with much connotation but no denotation. Consider in particular the last six lines of the verse. Even the number ten is diffused; it becomes twice five. The adjectives are all general: 'fertile,' 'bright,' 'sinuous,' 'incense-bearing,' 'ancient,' 'sunny.' By considering this list of adjectives it becomes apparent that there is a kind of emotional common denominator between that can only be fully defined by considering the combined meanings of all the adjectives together. This is to say more than might at first seem apparent, and it is to say a substantial thing in praise of the verse. It is to say that the creative impulse is fully expressed with perfect economy and fine precision. It is the first adjective, fertile, that is perhaps most suggestive, and the last line is the appropriate conclusion with its emphasis on greenery.

But this picture of brightness and sun is played off against the more solemn tone of mystery in the first five lines. The sonorous roll of proper names in the first line establishes this tone, and it is important to bear in mind that it is a *tone* and not a concrete picture or the logical play of an idea that gives the verse any intrinsic merit to which it may lay claim. The verse as a whole is visual, but it is a suggestion of viscosity rather than a representation of the vision itself. It is genuine poetry after its kind, but its kind is not the highest. It is poetry of the incantatory variety, and it is likely to induce a drugged assent in the reader. It is because the assent which the reader gives to *Kubla Khan* is almost invariably of this kind that the influence of these first lines can make itself felt at such a distance as the third verse. The mind is too much lulled by the incantation to be minutely aware of the gradual decline in poetic power. To say, then, that the first verse of *Kubla Khan* is genuine poetry and that it successfully records an experience that has been felt, and now is realized in the verse, is not to say that the poetic roots are deep, or even in healthy soil.

There is a prevalent quality in Coleridge's poetry which would seem to take its character from that attraction which he felt towards childhood and infancy. The attraction becomes explicit in some of

his least happy poems, but indirectly it affects most of his poetry by a personal fairy vision, and a loosening of that close integration which should exist between the emotions and the intellect. Innocence is one of the positives most frequently invoked. In *The Ancient Mariner* there was a studied and direct simplicity of statement which endowed the supernatural machinery with an effective honesty. In referring to that quality earlier in the paper I applied the term innocent to it, and I would not like to confuse that use of the term with the strained and unsatisfactory ingenuousness to which I refer now. It is this attempt to remove the feelings and thoughts of maturity from their natural context of properly proportioned sophistication, to feel the mature emotions with the simplicity of a child, that leads Coleridge, except in several poems, to feel nothing with precision, and seldom to penetrate beyond the commonplace in experience. His poem called *Dejection: An Ode* is Coleridge's most complete triumph over that emotional flaccidity which his more habitual modes of feeling had engendered. But before considering it, in order to appreciate the triumph more fully, it would perhaps be prudent to examine briefly a typical specimen in Coleridge's more ordinary style. The following passage is from a poem called *The Keepsake*. It has been selected almost at random, and contains the usual Coleridgean elements:

In the cool morning twilight, early waked  
By her full bosom's joyous restlessness,  
Softly she rose, and lightly stole along,  
Down the slope coppice to the woodbine bower,  
Whose rich flowers, swinging in the morning breeze,  
Over their dim fast-moving shadows hung,  
Making a quiet image of disquiet  
In the smooth, scarcely moving river-pool.  
There, in that bower where first she owned her love,  
And let me kiss my own warm tear of joy  
From off her glowing cheek she sate and stretched  
The silk upon the frame, and worked her name  
Between the Moss-Rose and Forget-me-not—  
Her own dear name, with her own auburn hair!

This passage, especially the first sentence, is better than much of Coleridge, so there is no danger of doing him an injustice. A

detailed analysis would be superfluous. One may point, however, to the enchanted atmosphere that is being built up in the first sentence by means of 'the cool morning twilight' and 'the woodbine bower' and such hushed adjectives as 'dim' and 'quiet.' There is a decadent note in the use of the adjective 'rich' to describe flowers, and a suggestion of liturgicism in the phrase 'swinging in the morning breeze' that calls censers to mind and points ahead to the religiose-esthetic tradition. It is the fairy vision at work. Such an artificial vision could not but circumscribe the emotions which are worked out against its background. In the second sentence how restricted and falsified the human emotion necessarily becomes is so apparent that it is difficult not to blush for Coleridge. The tear drop is so far from being unusual with Coleridge that one might almost call it inevitable. A few lines beyond the passage which I have quoted above, he returns to the theme with renewed vigour,

Her voice (that even in her mirthful mood  
Has made me wish to steal away and weep).

The climax of such emotion will always tend to be the bathetic sentimentality that Coleridge arrives at in the last three lines of the quotation. I have devoted this much space to a consideration of *The Keepsake*, not, indeed, believing it to merit prolonged attention—what has been said has been obvious—but to recall to mind the general level of Coleridge's poetry that the nature of his success in the *Dejection Ode* may become more clear.

The imagery of the *Dejection Ode* is taken from Coleridge's familiar flow of experience. In this connection one cannot help recalling I. A. Richard's remark: 'When a writer has found a theme or image which fixes a point of relative stability in the drift of experience, it is not to be expected that he will avoid it. Such themes are a means of orientation.' The situation in the opening of the poem is one which is common to Coleridge's experience. He is considering the night, the moon, the unsettled weather with a contemplative eye. How often these same considerations had led to feelings of indulgence and to emotional perceptions of an uninteresting and indiscriminate kind a cursory survey of the poetry is sufficient to establish. But something new occurs in this poem. The emotional perceptions are refined. Coleridge ceases to



be the passive crucible of pleasure-giving thoughts and reminiscences. A new energy is generated in which the emotions are controlled by the intellect, and both are fused into a poetic whole. It is the creative impulse itself that has been metamorphosed, and which has led to these good results. Coleridge has acquired a mature self-consciousness that, under the circumstances of the poem, ineluctably leads to an exercise of the critical faculty.

The creative impulse, I suggested, was metamorphosed. It became, not the acceptance of feelings that brought pleasure and delight in their train, feelings of etherialized sensuousness, but regret that indulgence in those feelings was no longer possible. There is some analogy between the *Dejection Ode* and Wordsworth's *Immortality Ode*. This feeling of regret which is generated for the first time is a more natural and valid experience than the lush and suspicious emotion from whose loss the newer emotion claims its existence. It is an emotion that, while it may not set the nerves aquiver or the soul afire, springs from the deeper wells of feeling, and is accompanied by a free and searching play of the intellect. Coleridge resorts to his familiar images, the moon and stars, but they are no longer stimulations to excess, for now he must say :

I see them all so excellently fair,  
I see, not feel, how beautiful they are!

The material of his poetry is forced to submit itself to the discipline of his faculties, and those faculties have been chastened by what he believes to be sterility—a sterility brought on by prolonged excursions into regions of speculative reasoning.

The development of the poem is masterly. In the first verse the old situation is set—that meeting of physical and spiritual realities that in the past had set off so often facile emotions and created a poem. But in the signs of the coming storm there is a dull ominousness that corresponds to Coleridge's emotional state.

Well! If the Bard was weather-wise who made  
The grand old ballad of Sir Patrick Spence,  
This night, so tranquil now, will not go hence  
Unroused by winds, that ply a busier trade  
Than those which mould yon cloud in lazy flakes,  
Or the dull sobbing draft, that moans and rakes

Upon the strings of this Aeolian lute,  
Which better far were mute.  
For lo! the New-moon winter-bright!  
And overspread with phantom light,  
(With swimming phantom light o'erspread  
But rimmed and circled by a silver thread)  
I see the old Moon in her lap, foretelling  
The coming on of rain and squally blast.  
And oh! that even now the gust were swelling,  
And the slant night-shower driving loud and fast!  
These sounds which oft have raised me, whilst they awed,  
And sent my soul abroad,  
Might now perhaps their wonted impulse give,  
Might startle this dull pain, and make it move and live!

From the effective colloquialism of the first line, there is a slow retarded movement that suggests the torpor with which Coleridge struggles. The two parenthetical lines that glibly repeat the matter of the two preceding lines are effective because they emphasize the air of general, almost irresponsible listlessness. But at line fifteen there comes a sharper desire to experience emotions again with the old intensity. The desire becomes coupled with the approaching violence of the storm. There is, for a moment, a note of decisiveness;

And oh! that even now the gust were swelling,  
And the slant night-shower driving loud and fast!

The refreshing effect of 'the slant night-shower' carries a suggestion of hope, but the verse subsides almost at once to the same nerveless movement. The last line contains the first direct statement of the difficulty.

The second verse contains a further description of this 'dull pain,' and in this condition Coleridge helplessly surveys the landscape filled with those beauties to which in the past he had responded in a different key. He surveys them, noting the minute variations from which he had been so long accustomed to draw pleasure,

All this long eve, so balmy and serene,  
Have I been gazing on the western sky,  
And its peculiar tint of yellow green.

This exact particularity of observation, when followed by the next line of self-confessed emptiness,

And still I gaze—and with how blank an eye,

generates an emotion of its own. It is that consciousness of loss that follows on an intellectual recognition that a thing which one's capacities are incapable of embracing, is yet good and to be desired. In Coleridge's case it is intensified by the memory of experience, and it is the tension set up between the memory and the recognition of present incapacity from which the poetry of the *Dejection Ode* springs. Such poetry is necessarily dependent on the intellect which measures the past with the present and recognizes the discrepancy. Because the tragic stirrings of feelings are subdued, the baroque gesture unnatural, the emotion is far from being less real. It is informed by a consciousness that is in the last analysis, intellectual, and which controls the quality of the emotion itself.

The third verse is short. After the expanded description of the difficulty with which the second verse occupied itself, Coleridge confesses his inability to throw off this general debility of feeling, and begins to examine the cause more carefully in the last two lines:

I may not hope from outward forms to win  
The passion and the life, whose fountains are within.

The intellect now assumes a more explicit rôle in the fourth verse, and from the analysis of his own state of being Coleridge begins to evolve a kind of philosophy. The verse leaps forward with a new vitality—the vitality of the intellectual explorer. From apparent loss Coleridge has not only created poetry of a high order, but he begins to draw out a kind of wisdom as well. The fourth, fifth and sixth verses are concerned with the exposition of this wisdom. The movement is impersonally alive, and Coleridge speaks with a larger voice than he has ever known before. I have already suggested the analogy that might be drawn between this poem and Wordsworth's *Immortality Ode*. The similarity is difficult to localize, but it is strikingly present. One might, for example, compare the sixth verse of Coleridge's *Dejection Ode* with the first, and in less degree, the sixth verses of the *Immortality Ode*. I abstain from doing so here for it is difficult to see what purpose it could possibly

serve in understanding Coleridge's poetry, however interesting it might be as an exercise. In fairness to Coleridge it should be mentioned that his *Dejection Ode* was composed first.

The seventh verse is not as good as the others, and the poem would be better if it were omitted. The poem which began with an examination of self, by the eighth and final verse has been reorientated, and the wisdom which Coleridge has unfolded is deflected from a purely personal application by these concluding lines to the friend to whom the poem in its entirety is addressed.

I have tried not to enlarge upon this poem to the point of tediousness, yet it is, I think, the most important poem that Coleridge has left behind. I have tried to explain why it is his most mature and accomplished production. *The Ancient Mariner* has usurped too large a portion of renown. English literature would be poorer if it had not been written, but its excellence is of that type which, to gain a world is willing to sell its soul. *Kubla Khan* may be dismissed with a friendly nod to the first eleven lines. What else remains? *Christabel* is less excellent than *The Ancient Mariner*. *Lewti* is a pleasant poem. It perhaps deserves more than *Kubla Khan*, but the most generous criticism could not conscientiously say that it was more than a pleasing trifle. *Frost at Midnight* begins to move in the direction of the *Dejection Ode*, but in comparison with it *Frost at Midnight* is not a success. One may in addition sometimes find little poems like *Work Without Hope* whose first four lines are unexpectedly pleasant:

All Nature seems at work. Slugs leave their lair—  
The bees are stirring—birds are on the wing—  
And Winter slumbering in the open air,  
Wears on his smiling face a dream of Spring!

But one should not expect more from Coleridge. At the same time we should be grateful for his best poem, and even for *The Ancient Mariner*, and avoid patronizing. It is the exaggerated praise that has been given him, through no fault of his, which invites censure.

EUGENE MARIUS BEWLEY.

## CORRESPONDENCE

To the Editors of *Scrutiny*.

Dear Sirs,

From your last number it seems that the word 'liberal' is in danger of discription. Two parties drag at it simultaneously and in opposite directions; unless you, Sirs, take preventive measures it hardly seems likely that the word will survive.

Mr. Harding, I see, spells it both with a capital and with a small 'l.' I suggest he confines himself to one of these, preferably the capital. Then he will have a word of his own which he can drag off where he will.

For I don't know that the proprietors of this spelling are sufficiently perspicacious, or if perspicacious sufficiently alert to exercise control over him. They are the descendants of those who, about the second quarter of last century, arrogated to themselves and to their notions, their arts, that title which had hitherto been accorded to all arts and notions not servile. Henceforward only the Liberals were to be liberal, the rest of the world mechanics. Thereby they proved, as it had not been proved before, how *illiberal* human nature might be.

And also, perhaps, how humourless. The words 'Liberales' and 'Libéraux' were first imported from France and Spain to suggest that, however improbable to a sober islander, there were elsewhere groups of people claiming a monopoly in wisdom. 'But so do we,' put in the English Liberals, Anglicizing the opprobrious term.

That they could do so is to be explained only by a double ignorance, not always involuntary. First there was the ignorance which any claim to encyclopædism implies; and secondly that, of a different kind, which rendered such a claim possible. It might also be called innocence or lack of experience. By unfortunate chance or diabolic prevision the Liberals had escaped, and by sluggishness of imagination were unable to conceive, the distresses which provoke knowledge.

From such people, I have suggested, Mr. Harding need fear no exacting supervision. But from time to time, I must confess, the

doubt occurs to me whether, if any were exercised, he would resent it. In his review he too hobnobs with ignorance—at least that is a possible explanation of what he does, and I can think of no other. He patronizes Mr. Eliot, he puts his trust in history according to J. M. Robertson and Joseph McCabe.

Nor do I find his positives reassuring, however vaguely described. They bear a strong resemblance to those of the Liberal tradesman of last century, who believed in material progress; and of the boy-scout, the novel-reader and the cinema-goer of to-day. Though the latter pretend 'ideal' ambitions, what they pursue are the tradesman's in a nebulous form. Of the itch for adventure and lust for novelty, which are all Mr. Harding's 'exploration' comes to, Burke long ago gave an adequate account to the Duke of Bedford: such things are, he said, 'an indulgence for those who are at their ease.' They are a function of complacency, and complacency of ignorance. The Duke of Bedford was still sufficiently in awe of tradition not to call himself a Liberal: Mr. Harding perhaps after all would not be reluctant to be condemned as one, and of a most capital sort.

Yours faithfully,

JAMES SMITH.

As a former Boy Scout (I prefer capitals here) and even now a novel-reader and cinema-goer, I naturally find Mr. Smith's elegant and scholarly letter rather baffling. Most of it seems quite remote from the simple theme of my review. However, there is at least one relevant statement which I can understand, and that is untrue. Mr. Smith says that what I called 'exploration' amounts only to the itch for adventure and the lust for novelty. It doesn't. In the space of a rejoinder to a reply to a review of three reprinted lectures I can hardly expound this assertion. It is my word against Mr. Smith's. I can only say—and leave it at that—that he hasn't a monopoly of spiritual experiences, even though the intellectual framework in which I try to arrange mine is not one that recommends itself to him.

I know that Christian apologists have an interpretation of the persecution of Galileo and similar incidents which serves to remove the discredit from the Church; and Brother George Every, in a

personal letter, puts this case persuasively enough to bring me to an open mind about it.

If my tone towards Mr. Eliot could be regarded as patronizing I am most sorry. I believe that in spite of superior capacities of mind Mr. Eliot is more mistaken in some of his attitudes and beliefs than I am. If my review did suggest anything else I can only plead the difficulty of discussing publicly a question that provokes strong personal convictions on both sides.

This covers all of Mr. Smith's letter that seems relevant to the review. The rest only means that he disagrees with my general outlook and I should have been sorry to leave him in any doubt about that.

D. W. H.

To the Editors of *Scrutiny*.

Dear Sirs,

My attention has recently been called to two articles on Chapman by James Smith in your issues of March and June, 1935, in which a reference is made to an editor of Chapman that seems to call for a reply. On page 346 of the March number Mr. Smith quotes eight lines from *Byron's Conspiracy* (III, 1, 32-39) to which he prefixes the remark: 'the innocent archaism of "let" in the sense of "hinder" has tripped up an editor.' As an editor, I believe the only editor, of this play I beg to submit a few words in rebuttal.

It would indeed be an ignorant editor who was unfamiliar with this 'innocent archaism'; the formula 'without let or hindrance' is a commonplace; the verbal 'let' in the sense of 'hinder' occurs in Tennyson and Morris, to say nothing of a line in *Hamlet* 'I'll make a ghost of him that lets me.' Certainly 'to let' may mean 'to hinder' but does it in this passage? Let me quote the lines in question:

You, that have made your way through all the guards  
Of jealous state, and seen on both your sides  
The pikes' points charging heaven to let you pass.

Mr. Smith, it seems, interprets the last words as meaning 'to prevent your passing.' I believe that this is an impossible interpretation.

In the first place we may consider the phrase from the point of view of syntax. The verb 'let' meaning 'hinder,' often takes

a preposition 'of' or 'from' as in the O.E.D. citations from Malory, Tennyson, and Newman. Shakespeare uses it at times simply with a noun as object, as in the phrase from *Hamlet* quoted above or in *Lucrece* (I. 328) 'who—his course doth let;' at times with an infinitive, 'nothing lets to make us happy' (*Twelfth Night* V 1, 256) or with a dependent clause introduced by 'but,' 'what lets but one may enter,' (*Two Gentlemen* III 1, 113 and *Comedy of Errors* II 1, 105). I can find no instance in the quotations in O.E.D. or in Shakespeare of such a construction as Mr. Smith assumes in the Chapman lines. We might, perhaps, expect that Chapman, if he meant to use the verb in the sense of 'hinder,' would have written 'to let your passage,' which would be good Elizabethan English, but he did not. The use of 'let' in the sense of 'permit' with a following infinitive (normally without 'to') is common in Elizabethan as in earlier and later English—see citations in O.E.D. *sub* 'let' II, 12.

There is, I think, a stronger argument against Mr. Smith's interpretation than these syntactical considerations. It rests upon the imagery of the whole passage. Byron, who has overheard La Fin's 'feigned passion,' reproaches him and reminds him that he has made his way through all the guards of jealous state (i.e., the sentries guarding a royal presence) at which time he, La Fin, has seen 'the pikes' points charging heaven' (i.e., 'lifted in salute,' see my note *ad loc.*) to allow him to pass through. Pikes are not lifted toward heaven, but dropped and crossed to 'let,' 'hinder,' the passage of an intruder. That the pikes in this passage are lifted is clear, I think, from the following lines, not quoted by Mr. Smith:

Will you, in flying with a scrupulous wing,

Above those pikes to heavenward, fall on them?

The image plainly that of a bird falling on the points of upraised pikes. Elsewhere (p. 350) Mr. Smith speaks and speaks well of Chapman's 'piercing eye and concrete imagination.' Is not this passage an admirable example of these qualities? Chapman has seen the pikes of a royal guard raised in salute to pass a royal favorite and he goes on to imagine such a favorite flying high above the points only to fall upon them like a broken-winged bird because of 'ignorant conscience' and 'cowardice.' To mistake the archaism 'says Mr. Smith' ruins an impressive passage. To my



mind the passage is completely ruined and the imagery blotted out if one interprets 'let' as an archaism here.

Pursuing his statement that 'Chapman is not read with sufficient care' Mr. Smith goes on to quote two lines from Bussy:

Come, Siren, sing, and dash against my rocks  
Your ruffian galley, rigged with quench for lust.

and remarks that it has not always been remembered in Italian a *ruffiano* is a pimp. That is, to be sure, an Italian meaning; does the English *ruffian* contain the same sense? I find no citations in O.E.D. of 'ruffian' equivalent to 'bawd,' 'bully,' possibly 'pimp,' before 1618 when Morrison takes over directly the Italian sense. The word, of course, is common in Shakespeare, but never, I think, with the sense that Mr. Smith assumes it has here. Further such a sense is excluded, I believe, by the context. In this scene (*Bussy* V 1) Montsurry is using threats and violence on his wife to obtain two distinct ends, to make her write a letter giving an assignation to her lover, and also to make her name their go-between, the 'most inscrutable pandar' (line 76). Is the 'ruffian galley' the lover, or, as Mr. Smith implies, the go-between? Plainly the former, as an earlier editor, Professor Boas, notes; in fact, Bussy the lover, has already (III 11, 62) been called a ruffian. Montsurry in the lines cited bids her 'sing'; a little later (line 75) he says: 'Sing, that is write, and *then* take from my eyes the mists that hide the pandar.' It is to the lover that the lady is forced to write, not to the pandar, whose identity is shortly after revealed to Montsurry by his appearance on the scene and his quite inexplicable death. If we were to interpret 'ruffian' as 'pimping' we must go on to refer 'galley' to the pandar, but such a reference is quite contrary to the whole action of the scene.

After so detailed an examination of these scenes it is perhaps hardly worth while to remark that on page 54 of the June issue Mr. Smith charges Bussy with killing three men in the famous duel. A casual glance at the scene (II, 1) in which the Nuntius reports the fight will show that Bussy kills only two, Barrisor and L'Anou; the third, Pyrrhot killed, and was killed by, Bussy's friend Melynell (II, 1, 127-130); Mr. Smith says quite truly 'Chapman is not read with sufficient care.'

THOMAS MARC PARROTT.

Princeton University.

To the Editors of *Scrutiny*.

Dear Sirs,

It is many years since you were good enough to publish my essays on Chapman. If I were to handle the subject again, I have no doubt I should find it necessary to revise them extensively. In general I no longer think Chapman as important as I did; in particular I regret the manner in which I criticized Professor Parrott. It was ungracious; he is justified in his complaint and I offer him my apologies. In extenuation of my offence let me plead I hope I should not commit it now.

If, however, I no longer wish to defend my essays in their entirety, neither do I wish entirely to abandon them. If I did so, Professor Parrott must pardon me for saying it would not be for the sort of points he raises. None of them seems of the greatest importance, the last in especial deserving neither his ink, nor mine, nor the printers. My essays were abominably obscure, but one thing at least about them I should have thought might be clear. Between them and Professor Parrott's edition there are differences, not only of detail, but of fundamental principles.

But I will take in order the first two points he is good enough to raise. About the first it seems to me that he is probably correct; about the second certainly wrong.

I hope I did not intend the implication that he was ignorant of the archaic meaning of 'to let.' I implied, and now I see I did it wrongly, that the meaning had not occurred to him as he read. I must confess it had not occurred to me that there was a difference between 'let' and 'let to'; or that 'raised in salute' was even a possible interpretation of 'charging heaven' (was it not a custom that pikes should be 'vailed'? but I do not know). In any case I was culpably blind in not seeing that the image might be what Professor Parrott says it is: that of an honoured visitor at Court passing between deferential guards. The contrast between his easy and purposeful progress and the attempted vertical progress of a bird is very much in Chapman's manner. Even if the bird's attempt were not vain, it would be foolish.

To my mind the contrast was, not between a man and a bird, but between two birds. One of these, flying horizontally, had at least hopes of attaining its goal; and Byron, as I understood him, was reminding La Fin that he had shown skill in doing so. Obstacles

had been thrust in his way, such as 'raised pikes'; and this was my interpretation of the phrase 'charging heaven.' I still think that the participle 'charging' is in its favour, as also the hostility of the whole line:

The pikes' points charging heaven to let you pass.

Further, if La Fin has his way made for him it is not very happy to describe him as 'making way through . . . jealous state.' But now I agree that Chapman was capable of such inaccuracies; and Professor Parrott's argument from syntax (as far as I can see; though I know little of the matter) is decisive.

My remark about the meaning of 'ruffian' followed upon another that, to guard against misunderstanding Chapman, one should be prepared with a mass of miscellaneous knowledge, especially etymological and antiquarian. I would now extend this to cover many or most of his contemporaries; and of the word 'ruffian' in particular would maintain that none of them could see it or use it in the same sentence as 'siren,' 'quench' and 'lust'—

Come, Siren, sing, and dash against my rocks  
Your ruffian galley, rigged with quench for lust—

without evoking the associations of 'bawd' or 'pandar.' If the O.E.D. maintains otherwise then it must be wrong; and that is not wholly unlikely. It was put together with the help of readers, many of whom—Professor Parrott must again excuse me—like him were infected with what might be called the heresy of provincialism. They believed that there was an English literature which was other than a branch or department of the literature of Europe; and which might therefore be studied by and for itself.

In my essay I said that 'ruffiano' was Italian for pimp. That was my ignorance; it is also French, Spanish and medieval Latin. From one or other of these sources it must have been familiar to Englishmen long before 1618.

If not, how does Professor Parrott interpret the word in a passage such as the following, from *The Comedy of Errors* (2, 2, 135)? Adriana is speaking to the man she thinks her husband:

How deerely would it touch thee to the quicke,  
Shouldst thou but heare I were licentious?

And that this body consecrate to thee,  
By ruffian lust should be contaminate?

She is not suggesting that he would be touched if she were violated, as she might be by a ruffian in Professor Parrott's sense; but if she were prostituted, as she could only be by a ruffian in mine. Or when the Prince and Claudio (*Much Ado*, 4, 1, 92) accuse Hero of talking 'with a ruffian at her chamber window,' does Professor Parrott think they mean one who is merely a swaggerer and not rather a bawd—or at least one who is both swaggerer and bawd together? Among the charges which Prince Hal, speaking as his father, brings against Falstaff is that of being 'Father Ruffian' (*I Henry IV* 2, 4, 500): coming as it does between 'grey Iniquitie' and 'Vantie in yeeres' 'Father Swaggerer,' or even Father Villain, is the least that it implies. Finally Cæsar in *Antony and Cleopatra* (4, 1, 4) refuses Antony's challenge with the words:

. . . let the old ruffian know  
I have many other wayes to dye.

It is true that Antony has just been behaving in an unruly manner; but is it not possible or even likely that a second reference is intended, namely to his lechery in the East? In weighing this evidence Professor Parrott will bear in mind that the various senses of a word are not wholly unconnected: to prove that 'swaggerer' is meant in a certain passage, is not to prove also that 'bawd' cannot be meant. A bawd is frequently a swaggerer or a bully; and indeed 'bully,' as Professor Parrott notes, came in time to mean 'bawd.'

On the point immediately under discussion the O.E.U. is in fact not quite so unhelpful as appeared to Professor Parrott. Had his eye glanced from the article 'ruffian' to those which follow he would have found many quotations anticipating Morrison. As early as 1549, for example, Coverdale wrote of 'light ruffianying and blasphemous carnal gospelling'; and again in 1556 of 'intemperance, ruffianying, gluttonie.' Swaggering is rarely if ever spoken of as 'light,' bawdry often; and it is bawdry rather than swaggering which groups itself among the fleshly sins. To save space I give a select list:

*anno* 1579 every manner of wanton or ruffianly leaping and  
frisking

1580 ruffianlike railing and whorish scolding

1583 all manner of lewdnesse and ruffianry

1598 bawdries or ruffianlike tricks

1611 (Florio) *ruffianesco* ruffianish

(Cotgrave) *ruffiener* to Ruffianize, to pandarize it,  
make or set lecherous matches.

(Coryat) She will . . . cause thy throate to be cut  
by her Ruffiano.

As for the interpretation of Montsurry's lines, once the meaning of 'ruffian' has been settled, I am somewhat embarrassed; I must it seems explain that they are metaphorical. Describing Bussy as a pandar, Montsurry no more accuses him of acting as go-between than, describing him as a galley, he asserts Bussy is built of timbers with a sail. Madly in love with his wife, Montsurry cannot conceive that anyone is in love with her but himself; or that, as she is not in love with him, she is in love with anybody. If she has commerce with men, then he thinks it can only be the commerce of lust. And Bussy is rigged—stored I suppose, or equipped—to quench such lust. In conveying the equipment to Tamyra, though he may think of himself as a lover, he is virtually a pandar; in receiving him, though she thinks herself a great lady she is a harlot in the stews.

The image has the force of vice and none of its grossness, purged by its classical and maritime associations. They are brought from far; but at the same time a bridge is, so to speak built to them by 'ruffian' in another meaning, not yet considered. It is that of a pandar who is not heavy and bullying, but gaily dressed and in particular long-haired: Professor Parrott will find an excellent instance of the meaning 2 *Henry IV* (III, i, 22). The winds are spoken of

Who take the Ruffian Billowes by the top,  
Curling their monstrous heads.

When this meaning is remembered, the galley is seen almost with the physical eye to surge past, ribbons and pennants streaming. I am glad to have been brought back to this image: it almost restores my opinion of Chapman.

Yours sincerely,

JAMES SMITH.

## COMMENTS AND REVIEWS

### '*ENGLISH IN SCHOOLS.*'

Mr. Denys Thompson's withdrawal, which readers will have noted with regret, from the Editorial Board of *Scrutiny*, means, they will be glad to learn, that he is now able to devote himself to *English in Schools*, a journal (see inside back cover of this number of *Scrutiny*) the admirable purpose of which is indicated by the title.

## HOW TO READ A NEWSPAPER

### *BETWEEN THE LINES, OR HOW TO READ A NEWSPAPER,* *by Denys Thompson (Frederick Muller, 3/6).*

Mr. Thompson here enlarges on one aspect of the subject of *Culture and Environment*. It is, perhaps, the most important aspect of all, for even those of us who pride ourselves—with or without reason—on our immunity from the blandishments of advertisements and popular entertainment would hesitate to claim that we are entirely unaffected by our daily paper. It becomes, therefore, increasingly important to be on our guard—especially when we are inclined to agree with the paper's comments—and to try to put others on their guard; at the present time, this is even more important than usual, for war has given political propagandists of all shades full scope. In spite of the Government's declared intentions, a certain section of the Press has begun to dig up atrocity stories of the last war, invent new ones and—no doubt intentionally—help to create a mentality which will approve of atrocities if committed on the right side. In this they would seem to have the support of at least one Cabinet Minister, who is fully aware of the emotional effect of a term such as 'Huns.'

Mr. Thompson's book is well arranged, and his examples fairly chosen and amusing—except when they are too grossly dishonest for amusement. He does not confine himself to detailed analysis or comments on tone or intention, but can show how a certain type of paper can contradict itself even in its so-called facts. (We might notice, at the time of writing, the number of Finnish victories, not mentioned in official communiqués, which are the result of wish-fulfilment on the newspaper's part.) He deals with the distortion and suppression of news, the substitutes for news and the pervading power of propaganda in its various forms. There are examples on which we can test our own discernment.

It must be admitted that the book suffers from a certain breathlessness that was a drawback to *Reading and Discrimination*. The author seems sometimes in too much of a hurry to elucidate a point, and assumes that his readers know all this already. This, of course, lays him open to the charge of preaching to the converted, and is particularly noticeable in the exercises at the end of the book. I don't think the average reader would know quite what to make of: 'How would you describe the texture of the writing in each of these passages?' or: 'What is the quality of the argument in each of these quotations?' If we could have rather more elementary and graded exercises, there is no reason why the book should not be a successful class-book for upper forms and W.E.A. classes. As it is, in the hands of the teacher it will provide plenty of admirable material for discussion at almost all stages, especially as the lines of attack are indicated so clearly, and further subject-matter lies at hand for everyone. It has the advantage, too, of starting by criticism of something which is familiar to even the very young, and the faults of which can be demonstrated so easily: a contradiction in statement is much easier to point out than the 'appeal' of an advertisement.

The book, we are told, is designed for the general reader, but I'm afraid that people who can't 'read' in the author's sense will scarcely be likely to tackle it; I'm sure its chief use will be in teaching of various kinds and there, with the qualifications I have made above, it should be of very great value—all the more so for its appearance in a time when even the wariest are apt to let their standards get rather damaged.

F. CHAPMAN.

## EDUCATIONAL

*VILLAGE LIFE AND LABOUR*, ed. by C. G. Hutchinson and F. Chapman (Cambridge University Press).

*THE CONTROL OF LANGUAGE*, by Alec King and Martin Ketley (Longman's, Green and Co., 3/6).

All teachers who feel truly sorry Industrial Man's dominion has broken Agricultural Man's social union, and who want to persuade their pupils to share their sorrow, will be grateful to the compilers of *Village Life and Labour*. 'For the twentieth century,' say the authors, 'the terms Culture and Agriculture connote entirely different, unrelated worlds. It is the aim of this book to suggest that this antithesis is false.' To this end they have collected passages from the writings of Cobbett, Jefferies, George Sturt, T. Hennell, Adrian Bell, A. G. Street, Walter Rose, and H. E. Bates, and classified them under three headings: Agriculture, Crafts Ancillary to Agriculture, and Other Rural Industries. They feel their selections are worth study in themselves, as specimens of 'good sound English prose,' and hope that readers will be led on to peruse the complete works of the authors represented.

What I find admirable about the book is this: that, at a time when educationalists are more than ever cashing in on enthusiastic adolescent dealism, and forming would-be world-changing groups, full of self-sacrifice, civics, and social service, it offers means whereby the child can get some sort of glimmering of what is meant by culture and civilization, and a deeper insight into the sort of values which ought to underlie the good life, than he is likely to obtain from most of the hand-books about our changing universe that are written specially for his benefit.

Messrs. Hutchinson and Chapman are not nostalgic about the past: they quote with approval Jefferies' saying that his 'sympathies and hopes are with the light of the future'; and this is another good point about their book—though I could wish it had been made even more explicit. All culture, whether individual or social, is a matter of balance. It is the virtue of writers like Jefferies and Sturt that they perceived and recorded states of social and individual equilibrium; but the danger of concentrating on their work may be a tendency to regard the past as endowed with a kind



of static perfection. It is not irrelevant to remember that the celebrated waggon was in its present form a seventeenth century invention—not very old, as agriculture goes. And if you were a muck-spreader, or a horse, would you rather have a tumbril with a pair of Mr. Sturt's wheels on it, or a pair of pneumatic-tyred ones?

There are two things which I do not like about the book. The first is the inclusion of the bit about lace-making by H. E. Bates. Its subject matter is interesting, but beside Cobbett and Sturt it sounds like what it is, a piece of sentimental journalese. The second is the bibliography, which is inordinately long for a book of this kind, and shows no critical discrimination whatever. The beginner can only be flabbergasted by such a display of erudition; what he wants is a guide not a catalogue; and what sort of guide is he who counsels one to read the complete works of A. G. Street? *Farmer's Glory*, yes: but not, surely, *all* the rest.

*The Control of Language* is a useful book. The authors acknowledge their indebtedness, for their 'starting point and inspiration,' to the works of Mr. C. K. Ogden, and Prof. I. A. Richards. It contains chapters on scientific prose, emotive prose, and style, and is liberally illustrated by examples drawn from standard authors, from contemporaries, and from journalism. The exercises are good, and give scope for creative as well as for critical writing. It would be suitable for school certificate work, for sixth forms; and in particular for those sixth formers who do not specialize in English, but who have, often unwillingly, to devote a few periods to a subject they are inclined to despise.

T. R. BARNES.

## SCIENTIFIC HUMANISM

*DANGEROUS THOUGHTS*, by Lancelot Hogben (Allen and Unwin, 8/6).

As a popular writer on science, Professor Hogben is in the tradition of T. H. Huxley. He has the merits as well as the limitations involved in that 'robust materialism' which he praises in Huxley, and his genuine concern for directed social change must command respect. At the same time there is evidence in the book of a widening gap between scientific and humanistic studies—Huxley would hardly have referred to Berkeley as an 'official logician,' or expressed the hard-boiled indifference to the arts that Professor Hogben parades.

Out of a collection of essays that cover between them a wide range, it will be necessary to concentrate on a few points, and it seems best to ignore the frequent capricious and crude *obiter dicta*. As Professor Hogben says in the introduction to *Mathematics for the Million* of similar 'asides and soliloquies' in that work: 'They are put in to sweeten the pill. Maybe many of them have as little nutritive value as saccharine.' I prefer to concentrate on points where the reader of *Scrutiny* is likely to welcome much of what Professor Hogben says, yet will feel compelled to part company with him on important topics, or at least raise further questions where he rests satisfied.

A point on which agreement is likely to be little qualified—just because ultimate ends are not at once obtrusive—is that discussed in the first essay, which is one of the most valuable in the book. Professor Hogben distinguishes between what he calls scientific humanism, and the type of Socialism which aims merely at a change in the *administrative* machinery of industry. Scientific humanism attaches itself rather to the 'Utopian' Socialism of the nineteenth century, which 'in opposition to the Liberal doctrine that prosperity is being able to choose the greatest variety of goods, asserted the need to decide whether the dark satanic mills were making things which are good for men to choose.' It matters little that in the long run Professor Hogben's idea of 'what it is good for men to choose' may seem conditioned by his 'robust materialism.' The important thing is the extent to which he is

prepared from a very different starting-point to recognize the need for value-judgments on the quality of living of the kind that *Scrutiny* has always insisted on. And his belief in the possibilities afforded by technological advance for 'a programme of bio-esthetic planning which may prove more congenial to basic human needs than the spectacle of a sixpenny store building' is useful for anyone who wishes to defend the sort of insistence referred to against the charge of being merely negative and nostalgic. As for the urgency of the problem—'Fascism is the reaction of outraged human nature endowed with enough intelligence to be exasperated, and too demoralized to explore an alternative constructive use for the new powers at hand.'

Equally valuable material is to be found in the seventh essay, where the contrast between the two types of Socialism appears as that between 'planning for survival' and 'planning for purchasing power.' Urbanization is connected with declining fertility. 'The pattern of passive satisfaction and conspicuous expenditure encouraged by an increasing multiplicity of useless commodities and new distractions is only one side of the psychological problem presented by urban concentration . . . In the city reproduction is an unwarranted intrusion of hospital practice on the orderly routine of a mechanized existence.' And in the same essay the 'Utopian' Socialists are praised because 'they were not hypnotized by the liberal delusion that things people have been educated to demand by capitalist advertisement are necessarily the things they *need* most.'

These quotations, admittedly selected with care, will serve to show in what respect a reader of *Scrutiny* is likely to welcome and applaud Professor Hogben's work, while bearing in mind that Professor Hogben's estimates of 'basic human needs' is not likely to be exactly his. This reservation leads to a consideration of another set of problems on which agreement is likely to be much more qualified: those, namely, which centre in the notion of 'culture.' Here a reference to the review of Bernal's *Social Function of Science* in *Scrutiny* for June, 1939, will shorten discussion, for many of Mr. Lucas's criticisms of Professor Bernal would apply also to Professor Hogben.

Discussion may start from a passage in the sixth essay where two genuine senses and one bogus sense of 'culture' are distin-

guished. Of the genuine, 'one is the private problem of helping an individual to discover congenial sources of enjoyment to occupy leisure in later life' and the other 'the public business of equipping individuals with the knowledge necessary for the discharge of their mutual responsibilities as co-citizens of a democratic society.' We may regretfully agree that often 'in practice what is called cultural education is neither the one nor the other' but is the cultivation of 'good taste, which is synonymous with ostentatious refinement appropriate to a leisured class, while still feeling that what we mean by culture cannot be accounted for in terms of Professor Hogben's dichotomy, or at best that the kind of 'knowledge' which the book as a whole shows to be referred to under the second alternative is too much a matter of information, and too little one of wisdom, sensibility, or sense of relative importance. This is no doubt vague, but the reader will be able to give it body and concreteness (especially with the help of Mr. Lucas's review referred to above).

More detailed criticisms may be suggested. Granted the desirability of an integration of naturalistic and humanistic studies, does not Professor Hogben's insistence on the *necessity* of a fairly detailed education in the social potentialities of scientific discovery overlook the fact that the work *can* be done to a fair extent precisely by books like *Dangerous Thoughts*. The notion of a class of scientific or cultural middlemen—more respectfully, the notion of a hierarchy—might have repaid closer attention. Again, we do not find any conception of *interaction* between specialist and public, of an educated public opinion helping to direct the specialist in the light of the information they get from him about the kind of things he can do. Professor Hogben assumes too easily that 'knowing how science can be used to advance civilized living' carries with it agreement about ends (Mr. Lucas brings a similar charge against Professor Bernal).

Such comments are trite but perhaps not unnecessary. But the corrective to Professor Hogben's emphases cannot be given in generalities, and anyone who, while sympathizing with the desire for a scientific humanism, cannot believe that science will furnish its whole content, must pin his faith to the patient working out, in the concrete, of what is implied in a humanism in the line of descent from Arnold and (pace Professor Hogben) Dr. Johnson. As it is, it's possible to understand why Professor Hogben should turn

from a vaguely evoked 'European *spirit*' to the outstanding *achievements* of civilization in modern Europe and modern America.' One might suggest that the task of a humanistic education is to integrate 'spirit' and 'achievements' by trying to understand their interconnections, and by constant and conscientious judgments of relative value. Even if he hardly seems to admit the existence of the problems, Professor Hogben brings them before the mind and provides material for the working out of a solution. The vigour and acuteness of much of his work should be a challenge to those who are dissatisfied with his notion of humanism to state their disagreement with equal concreteness and clarity.

J. C. MAXWELL.

## THE GREAT YEATS, AND THE LATEST

*LAST POEMS AND PLAYS*, by W. B. Yeats (*Macmillan*, 6/6).

This is a saddening volume. That isn't merely because it illustrates once more that slackening of tension which is so apparent in Yeats's work of the past decade—the last. It was remarkable enough that his peak should come as late as 1928, the year of *The Tower*, and he could hardly be expected to keep up through his old age the taut, delicate and difficult complexity that *Sailing to Byzantium* (dated 1927), in that volume, represents supremely. The *Byzantium* (dated 1930) of the succeeding collection, *The Winding Stair* (1933), is also a fine poem, and it might appear at first sight to be of the same order; but, actually, comparison exposes a striking loss, and the organization is significantly less rich. And to this inferiority it seems reasonable to relate the large proportion of unsuccessful work—poems that, whatever they were for Yeats, are not poems for other readers: things in which the poet has handed over his job to Crazy Jane, and others in which allusiveness, oracular sparseness, esoteric suggestion and familiar types of 'images' and symbols don't produce organization.

There is plenty of this kind of unsuccess in *Last Poems and Plays*. But what makes this volume painful reading is that in it which reminds one of a point about *Byzantium* not yet made. The inferiority of that poem relates to the absence from it of the positives between which the complex tension of *Sailing to Byzantium* is organized. There is, on the one hand, no 'sensual music'—

The young  
 In one another's arms, birds in the trees,  
 Those dying generations—at their song,  
 The salmon-falls, the mackerel-crowded seas

—but instead :

All mere complexities,  
 The fury and the mire of human veins.

On the other hand, instead of the ' monuments of unaging intellect,' which are felt as a positive presence in *Sailing to Byzantium*, we find the ironic potentialities implicit in ' artifice of eternity ' developed into an intensity of bitterness and an agonized sense of frustrate impotence :

At midnight on the Emperor's pavement flit  
 Flames that no faggot feeds, nor steel has lit,  
 Nor storms disturbs, flames begotten of flame,  
 Where blood-begotten spirits come  
 And all complexities of fury leave,  
 Dying into a dance,  
 An agony of trance,  
 An agony of flame that cannot singe a sleeve.

Astraddle on the dolphin's mire and blood,  
 Spirit after spirit! The smithies break the flood,  
 The golden smithies of the Emperor!  
 Marbles of the dancing floor  
 Break bitter furies of complexity,  
 Those images that yet  
 Fresh images beget,  
 That dolphin-torn, that gong-tormented sea.

The bitterness prevails in *Last Poems and Plays*, and takes very unpleasant forms :

You think it horrible that lust and rage  
 Should dance attendance upon my old age;  
 They were not such a plague when I was young:  
 What else have I to spur me into song?—

There is enough in the book to give point to this comment of the poet's. And we don't need his own explicit prompting to make us ask whether the plight revealed, the terrible barrenness (see in particular the play, *Purgatory*), hasn't some critical bearing on his best poetry:

Those masterful images because complete  
Grew in pure mind, but out of what began?  
A mound of refuse or the sweepings of a street,  
Old kettles, old bottles, and a broken can,  
Old iron, old bones, old rags, that raving slut  
Who keeps the till. Now that my ladder's gone,  
I must lie down where all the ladders start,  
In the foul rag-and-bone shop of my heart.

Certainly 'masterful images' is appropriately suggestive in its application to the mature work, that on which Yeats's status as a major poet rests. The positives erected in it to support his 'ladder' may be said to be pride and an ideal aristocratic beauty, the two closely associated. Here, from *Last Poems and Plays*, is a characteristic image:

. . . Maud Gonne at Howth Station  
waiting a train,

Pallas Athene in that straight back and arrogant head.  
We can rarely forget the straight back and the arrogance in the late Yeats—the great Yeats—and the prevailing notes of the present volume make us remember what inseparable accompaniments scorn and bitterness always were of the positive attitudes. And even the sense of futility associated here with the quest of a strained perfection—

'Let the fools rage, I swerved in naught,  
Something to perfection brought;  
But louder sang the ghost, 'What then?'

[*Last Poems and Plays*, p. 18]

—was always there: we remember *I am worn out with dreams, The Collarbone of a Hare* and the rest. So there is an ironic pathos in that last stanza of *Among School Children* (in *The Tower*):

Labour is blossoming or dancing where  
 The body is not bruised to pleasure soul,  
 Nor beauty born out of its own despair,  
 Nor blear-eyed wisdom out of midnight oil.  
 O chestnut tree, great rooted blossomer,  
 Are you the leaf, the blossom or the bole?  
 O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,  
 How can we know the dancer from the dance?

The chestnut tree is a symbol for the fulness of life that is never to be found in Yeats's poetry and the suggestion of which is certainly not the attraction he offers. His heroic achievement—the development out of pre-Raphaelitism through the Celtic Twilight into a poetry quite clear of the Romantic 'poetical' tradition—will remain what it has been for us. The major quality and the element of greatness cannot be denied. But the sense of a heavy price paid and of power wasted and of results incommensurate with effort becomes stronger as we are able to look back and take stock. His pride and beauty, limited and qualified positives as they must in any case appear to us, are not there any substantial creation. What he has to give us is an attitude, defined in a manner and an idiom.

The valuation I intend may be indicated by saying that he seems to me, while a major poet, to come below Donne, Marvell, Pope, Wordsworth, Byron, Hopkins and Eliot.

There are some interesting things, of course, in this last volume, but the only poem that I find to add to the number of the memorable is *Those Images* (p. 47). To end, however, with a reminder of one of the more admirable aspect of Yeats's pride, here is the final stanza of *The Municipal Gallery Revisited*:

And here's John Synge himself, that rooted man,  
 'Forgetting human words,' a grave deep face.  
 You that would judge me, do not judge alone  
 This book or that, come to this hallowed place  
 Where my friends' portraits hang and look thereon;  
 Ireland's history in their lineaments trace;  
 Think where man's glory most begins and ends,  
 And say my glory was I had such friends.

F. R. LEAVIS.



## CLASSICAL AND ROMANTIC AGAIN

*TRADITION AND ROMANTICISM*, by B. Ifor Evans (Methuen, 6/-).

The conventional taste of thirty or forty years ago had at least the merit of a consistent view of literary history. The main poetic landmarks were fixed, the valuable territories charted, and even the barren waste of the eighteenth century neatly mapped out in terms of prosaic verse satirists and precursors of Romanticism. Your modern academic presents a confused and unhappy picture in comparison. While careful to show that he has outgrown the old prejudices, he nevertheless accepts no modern revaluation of the tradition, but tries desperately to make the most of all worlds. Afraid to commit himself to an original judgment of value, he accepts all the safe reputations and indulges in a kind of pseudo-scientific botanising among their secondary characteristics.

Professor Ifor Evans' book is unfortunately no exception. He sets out to show that the Romantic-Classical controversy is misleading, and proposes 'to examine the tradition of our poetry, or rather the conception of our poetry held by poets in successive centuries.' But we soon find that although it is an inadequate distinction, 'the polarity of "classical" and "romantic" remains often as the most tangible way in which the problem "the progress of poetry" can be approached.' We are invited to consider the different types of compromise between the two attitudes reached by the main English poets from Chaucer to Yeats and Eliot. Thus, Chaucer did not disdain the romances which he outgrew; Spenser combined Romantic chivalry and legend with moral and social aims, and Shakespeare, before the 'moral and intellectual' elements became prominent in his work had developed Chaucer's compromise. (Professor Ifor Evans is not deterred from slurring clumsily over most of the mature work.) Seventeenth century poetry is considered from the point of view of the effect of the new scientific thought and the absence of a native mythology. Donne dismissed mythology in his effort to keep poetry in contact with reality. Milton effects an individual compromise by bringing both romantic and classical elements into the service of a Christian epic; but Dryden, not finding a useful mythology to hand, subordinates verse to reason

and actuality. Pope's *Rape of the Lock* is 'part of the farewell to mythology which limited the purposes of eighteenth-century poetry.'

The blurb tells us that among the author's more challenging conclusions is his reassessment of the romantic poets. But the reader who expects something provocative and original will be disappointed. With an air of discovery Professor Ifor Evans repeats the truism that Scott, the Byron of the tales and the early Shelley belong really to the Gothic tradition. His account of Keats is the accepted one, more or less. He treats Wordsworth as a mystic who broke with the main tradition of English poetry since the Renaissance in trying to express a unique individual experience. Shelley's 'lyrical power,' we are told, should be admitted without question, but he always has an ethical or philosophical purpose, and in *Prometheus Unbound* he returns to tradition and revitalises the old classical mythology. With Victorians the tradition begins to break down; they failed to find a satisfactory mythology, since the classical variety was now inappropriate, but nevertheless much of their work can be 'accepted as poetical experience.' The pre-Raphaelite period contained within itself the reaction (Patmore, Hardy and Meredith, as well as Hopkins), which preludes the twentieth century.

Perhaps this summary gives some notion of the vague abstractions of Professor Ifor Evans' critical style. It remains to add that for the most part he avoids judgments, even of comparative value, except where he assumes the conventional estimate, and that he conducts his arguments with a minimum of quotation and particular analysis. This results in such statements as '(Donne) fell short of one aspect of greatness by the doubtful quality of his seriousness . . . the mind had become self-conscious in Donne's poetry, separated from wisdom.' One suspects that Professor Ifor Evans disapproves of the line of wit, or at least thinks it insignificant in the tradition, since he jumps straight from Donne to Cowley. Milton's verse, we are told, "returned to the adorned tradition of Spenser and Shakespeare and away from the abrupt realism and natural speech rhythms of Donne"—realism and speech rhythms one gathers, are not characteristic of Shakespeare. Milton's academic status is re-established with the invocation of Professor Grierson and the easy sidestepping of all the objections brought against his

grand style from Pope and Keats to Mr. Murry, Mr. Eliot, and Mr. Leavis: we hear of his 'intellectual triumph over form' and his beneficial influence on the verse of Wordsworth and Keats. The academic's method of critical defence is either to bring in, irrelevantly, the historical estimate, or to assert a broadminded and catholic appreciation of all established values in the manner of this remark on Gray: 'the verse is to be enjoyed as a picture or statue, or a vase elaborately chased and burnished. His verbal baroque . . . and the long complex stanza so adroitly controlled, offer enjoyment for those who, unlike Johnson, find pleasure in their rare and elaborate beauty.' Professor Ifor Evans' subtlety in discerning unsuspected literary parallels may be gauged from his statement that Tennyson 'in the Idylls as in much of his work, resembles not the poets who precede him but Dryden and Pope . . . like Dryden he wished to make 'good numbers,' and like Pope his interest was not self-revelation, but the study of men and society with intrusions into philosophy and morality.'

It would be tedious to pursue further examples. Professor Ifor Evans' 'defences' leave us cold, since he doesn't understand the 'attacks.' The notion that it is the duty of the critic to judge, *ériger en lois ses impressions personnelles*, and to relate his judgments to a scheme of moral values would no doubt strike him as crabbed and narrow. Poetry, he says, 'can accomplish a number of distinct things all valuable, and not much is gained by setting them in order of merit.' Catholicity of taste is a virtue, no doubt, but the alternative to academic timidity need not be an attempt to emulate Rymer or Le Bossu. The most useful critics are those who have honestly set down their individual judgments: what would Johnson or Coleridge have said to that 'all valuable'?

R. G. Cox.

## ‘NATURE’ IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

*THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY BACKGROUND*, by Basil Willey (*Chatto and Windus*, 16/-).

It is not easy to be sure what degree of unity Mr. Willey's book lays claim to. His purpose as he describes it in the preface is twofold: more generally 'to illustrate the importance, in the eighteenth century, of the idea of "nature" in religion, ethics, philosophy and politics, and in particular to indicate some stages in that divinization of "Nature" which culminates in Wordsworth,' and more particularly to provide 'prolegomena to the study of Wordsworth and Coleridge.' To these two purposes may be taken to correspond the two classes of readers he has in mind: 'the general reader who takes an unprofessional interest in the history of ideas' and 'the literary student who may care to seek for explanations or analogies outside the sphere of "pure" literature.'

Even at this point the doubt arises whether the very modesty of Mr. Willey's aims may not have prevented him from writing as serviceable a book as he otherwise might—whether the more ambitious project of appealing to a single class of readers presumed to be interested in correlating the history of ideas with the study of 'pure' literature might not have made possible a more satisfactory treatment. This suspicion is confirmed as we proceed in the book. Mr. Willey is, one might say, too solicitous for his readers. He disclaims the intention of giving a history of thought, nor does he trespass on literary criticism. Now no doubt there is a place for a study that is neither history of philosophy nor literary criticism, but surely some interest in both is presupposed if we are to follow with profit the sort of discussion that Mr. Willey gives us, and—my main point—we ought to be brought into contact with what is most vital both in thought and in 'pure' literature if we are to study their relations. Mr. Willey has chosen to take another course, and, for too much of the book, he ploughs a steady furrow through mediocrity. To exaggerate somewhat, he solves the problem of avoiding history of thought on the one hand and strict literary criticism on the other by devoting most of his space

to discussing what is neither thought nor literature—at least neither important thought nor important literature.

It is however a possible view that it is precisely second-rate thinkers like Hartley, Priestley, and Godwin that have the greatest influence on imaginative literature, so that Mr. Willey might be taking the best way of writing 'prolegomena to the study of Wordsworth and Coleridge.' And there is no doubt that it is useful to have his clear summaries of writers of the eighteenth century some of whose ideas reappear in the Romantic poets. But Mr. Willey is aiming at giving us rather more than that. He takes as his guiding thread the notion of 'nature,' and hopes to throw light on Wordsworth and Coleridge thereby. A good deal does emerge about the ambiguity of this conception in the eighteenth century, but it is here that Mr. Willey seems to have handicapped himself most by his decision not to go too deeply into the history of thought. By confining himself mainly to writers of minor importance, he turns what might have been a genuine history of a notion into a set of illustrations of a thesis which comes out at the end with little more significance than it has at its first formulation. In particular, the formula 'divinization of nature' used to refer to the process he discusses is one whose meaning does not really develop—it is only brought in from time to time as a guiding thread. Indeed, its appropriateness at any stage is not clear. It is doubtfully applicable to Wordsworth, and obviously it is not very precisely used to describe, in the early part of the book, the attitude towards nature which is expressed in the argument from design. Surely the prominence of this notion in eighteenth-century apologetic is due less to any deepened sense of the significance of nature than to the gap left by the disappearance in an unmetaphysical age of the argument from contingency. There is no doubt something in Mr. Willey's notion (p. 64) that 'the Wordsworthian nature-religion can be regarded, less as something wholly new, than as the culmination of a process which had been implicit in the "humanist" tradition ever since the Renaissance.' But it would need to be more elaborately developed and to be linked more precisely with the 'scientific movement' which Mr. Willey invokes in a cheerfully inclusive way in the first chapter. It is only right to add that this chapter contains a number of suggestive points; that, for instance, 'in passing into the seventeenth and eighteenth

centuries "Nature" ceases to be mainly a regulating principle, and becomes mainly a liberating principle' (p. 16).

The kindred theme of the transition from an 'abstract' to a 'concrete' idea of nature, from, say, the Deists to Burke, emerges more clearly. The chapter on Godwin and Burke shows a sense of many of the complications involved, and is perhaps the most satisfactory in the book. For one thing, the conceptions of nature and history to be found in Burke are genuinely relevant to the development of Wordsworth. But even here, in the rather compressed discussion on pp. 205-212, one misses a treatment that should get closer to grips with what is really living and important in thought and literature. The rather spectral figures of the previous chapters—Hartley, Holbach, Priestley—cannot really support the burden that Mr. Willey's argument imposes on them. The ambiguities of the word 'Nature' might, for instance, have been better brought out by reference to Rousseau, who had an awareness of such complexities denied to those lesser writers. On this point, Mr. Willey might with profit have consulted an article on Rousseau by D. J. Allan (*Philosophy*, 1937), and, in general, concentration on Rousseau might have modified the somewhat facile contrast of 'head' and 'heart' (p. 250)—the Rousseau whom Mr. Willey disposes of under the rubric of 'feeling' was also the thinker who put Kant 'on the right track.'<sup>1</sup>

When he finally arrives at Wordsworth, Mr. Willey's native candour compels him to admit the relative unimportance for the

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<sup>1</sup>It would be absurd to make Wordsworth into a systematic philosopher, but one might throw out the suggestion that his development would be better understood if it were connected with Rousseau's views on the transition from 'natural' to 'civil' liberty. Compare the point made in Mr. Allan's article (p. 202) that the purpose of this transition is 'not to spurn the natural order in favour of something different, but rather to flatter it by imitation,' and in his summary (p. 204) 'Rousseau preaches a return to nature, *first*, because he would have us embrace the natural education and religion, and *secondly*, because civilized society, though artificial, is according to him an imitation of nature. It models itself on the inflexibility of natural law.' Wordsworth's familiarity with *Emile* is well-known. Cf. Professor Harper's *Life*.

understanding of him of the background he has built up in the previous chapters. The relation with the conceptions of Burke is, as I have said, duly dwelt on, and the more fleeting influence of Godwin judiciously discussed. If anything, Mr. Willey tends to exaggerate the detachment from tradition of what is most essential in Wordsworth, just because—to hark back to a previous criticism—his discussion has not held firmly to the living continuity of literature. Instead we are presented with a Wordsworth whose individual vision is rightly and discriminatingly stressed, but whose connection with the past is summed up in the suggestion ‘that neither he nor others of his time might have lifted up their eyes to the hills for such help if the eighteenth century had not so unfalteringly directed them towards the visible universe as the clearest evidence of God.’ (p. 272). This inheritance (loosely described, as I have said, under the heading ‘divinization of nature’) shares with ‘the more obvious sanative virtues of the open-air’ the responsibility for the notion of Nature as a substitute for religion which Mr. Willey finds in various forms in Cowper, Rousseau, Gray, Wordsworth, Tennyson, Arnold and Mark Rutherford. Here as elsewhere (*e.g.*, p. 30) Mr. Willey seems to see analogies more clearly than differences. The differences, he might indeed say, belong to the literary critic, the analogies to the reader with ‘an unprofessional interest in the history of ideas.’ But the ignoring of literary differences could only be fully justified by a clearer presentation of the underlying unity of idea than Mr. Willey gives us. As it is, he suggests an assimilation of Wordsworth to the *Scholar Gypsy* attitude, and though this is modified by what follows, the picture remains a little out of focus.

Much of what I have said may seem less like a criticism than a complaint that Mr. Willey has not written a different sort of book. I do in fact wish that he had, but it would be unfair to leave the impression that his book does not contain much that should be of value for its professed purpose—as a ‘background.’ The balanced and untechnical sketch of Hume should be of special value to the literary student, and the other chapters on individual thinkers share the same qualities of care and lucidity.

J. C. MAXWELL.

## MUSIC

*THE MUSIC REVIEW*, Vol. I, No. 1, February, 1940 (Heffer and Sons, 4/- per copy, postage 3d., 16/- per annum, post free).

The inauguration of a new periodical seriously devoted to music is, in these times, remarkable in itself ; and though the contents of this, the first, number of *The Music Review* may not be peculiarly distinctive or stimulating we must remember that these are very early days and that if ' the musical public ' allows this venture to die as it has allowed so many others it can have only itself to blame that intelligent and well-informed discussion of the problems of music and of contemporary music-making is so hard to come by. This number is interesting mostly for a substantial article by Egon Wellesz on the symphonies of Mahler. Considering that Mahler has, on the continent and particularly of course in pre-Nazi Austria, for years been accepted and performed as a classic, the last of the great Viennese tradition that began with Haydn, and that his cause has been so fervently advocated by musicians and scholars as distinguished as Dr. Wellesz ; it is surely time that we in England were given an opportunity to hear his music played as he intended it to be played. As Dr. Wellesz points out, the fashionable movements that made him ' unfashionable ' are now antiquated themselves ; one has only to consider the example of the recordings which Bruno Walter has made for the Mahler Society to realize that Mahler's music, adequately performed, will always be independent of fashion. But the muscles of English musicologists are so preposterously contorted by the exquisite humour of their jokes about the colossal resources necessary to perform some of the ' old wind-bag's ' scores that no doubt they would be incapable of listening to his music even if they had the opportunity.

W.H.M.